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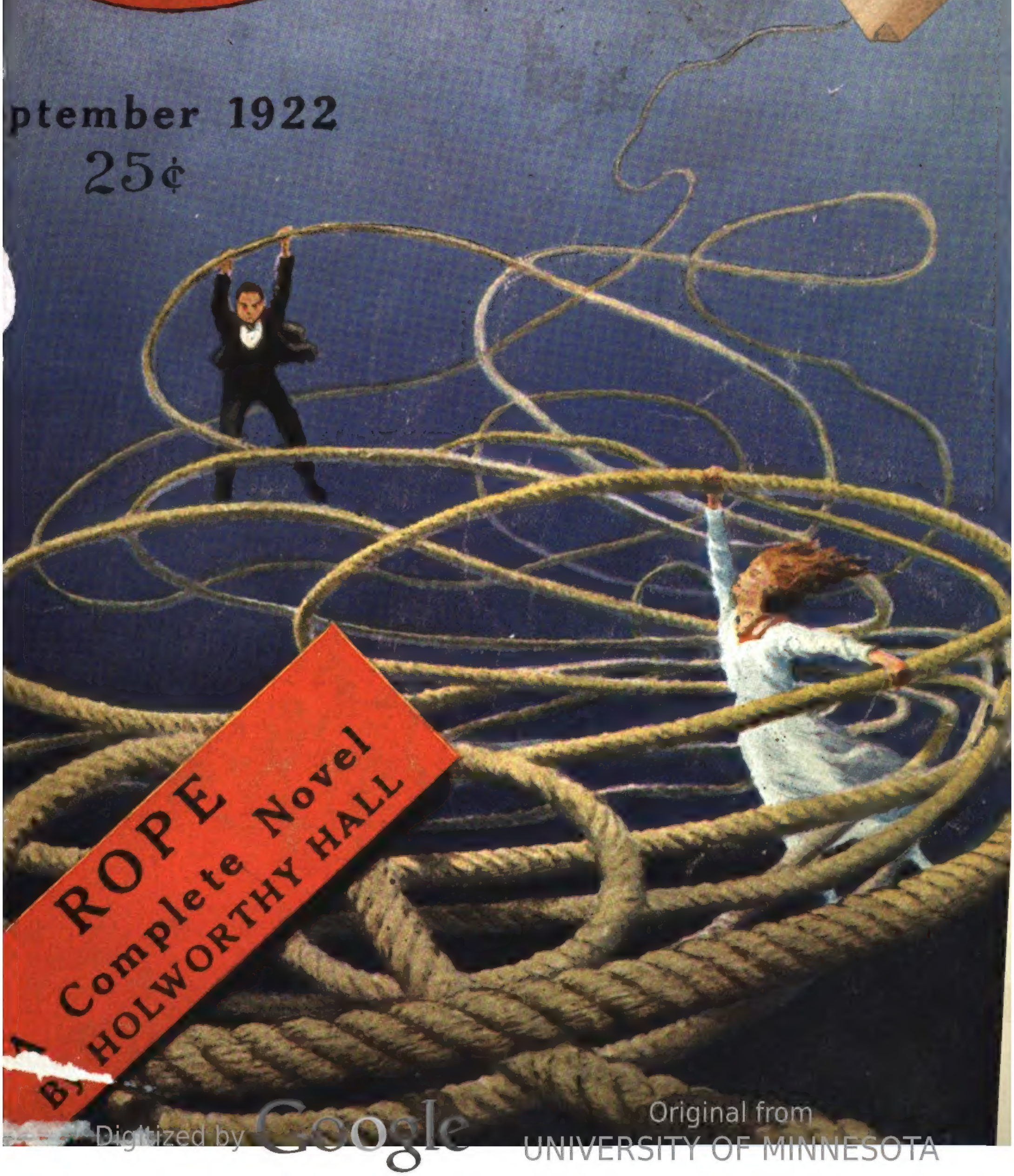

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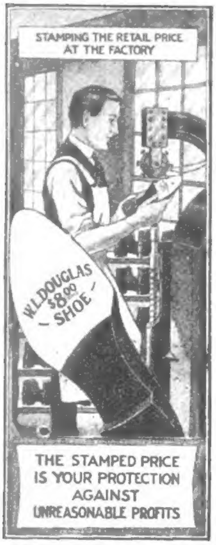
Volume XLVII
Number 3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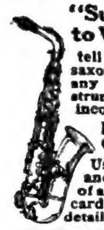

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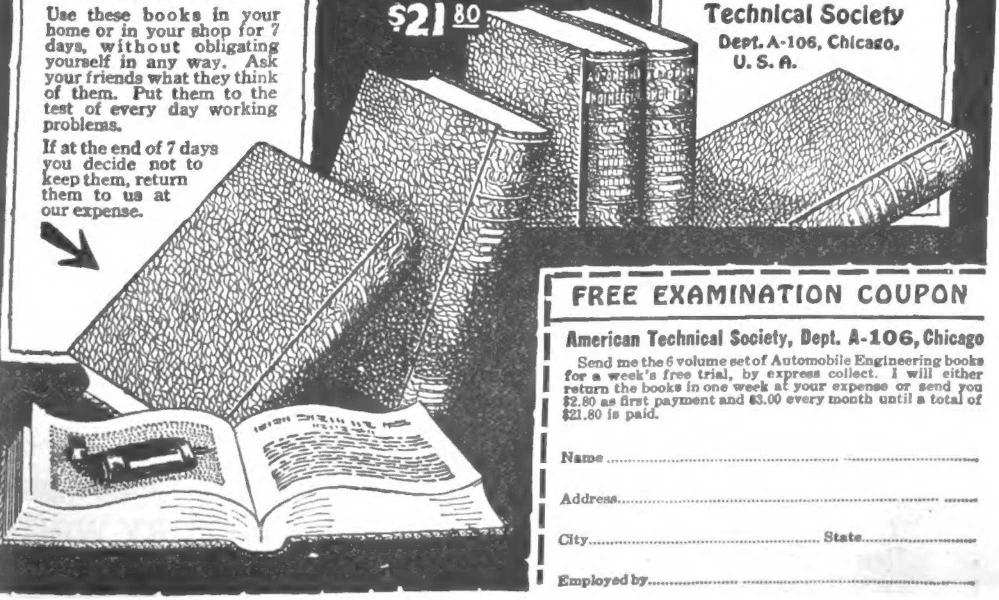

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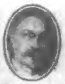

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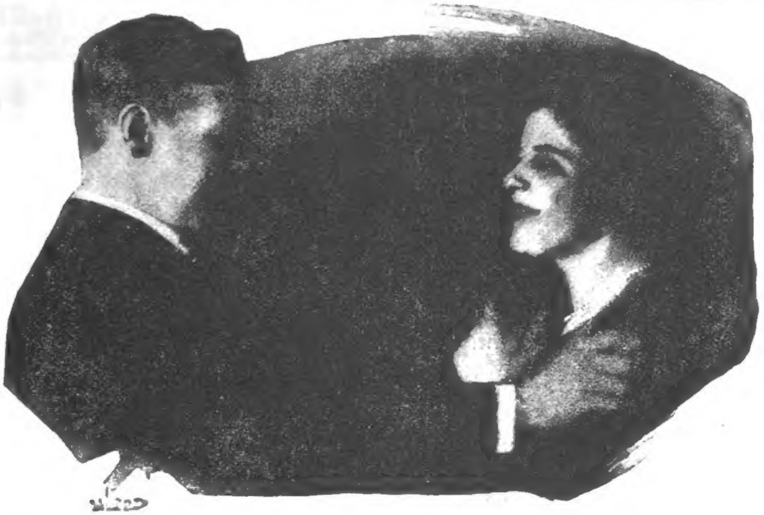

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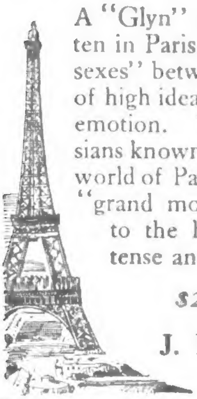

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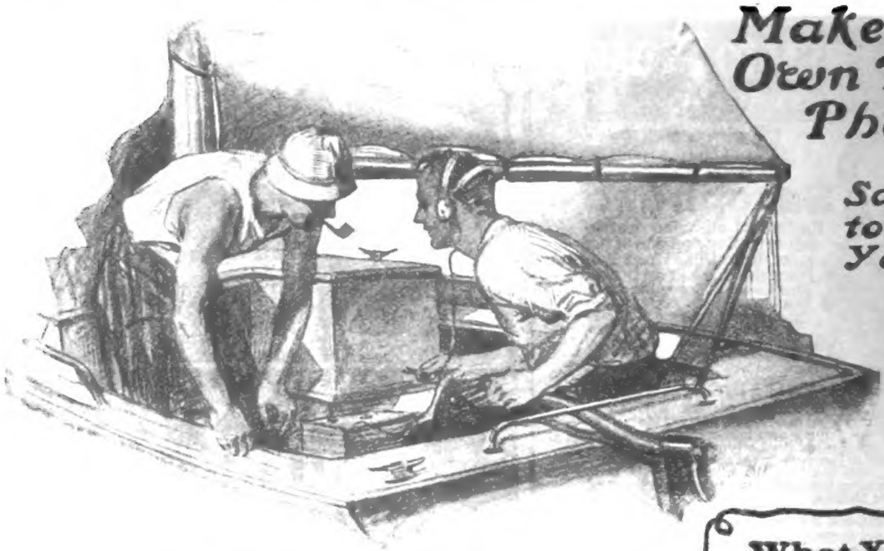

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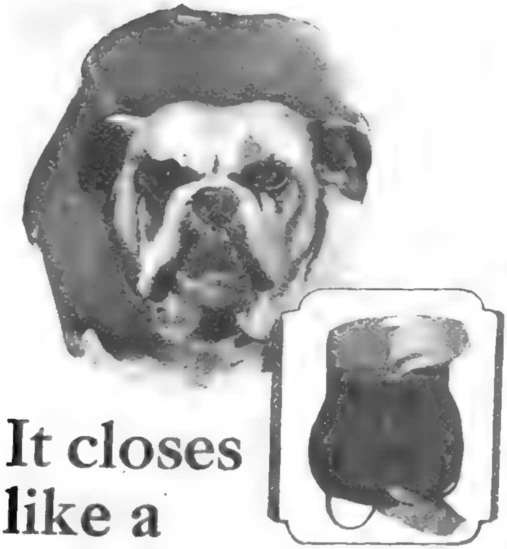

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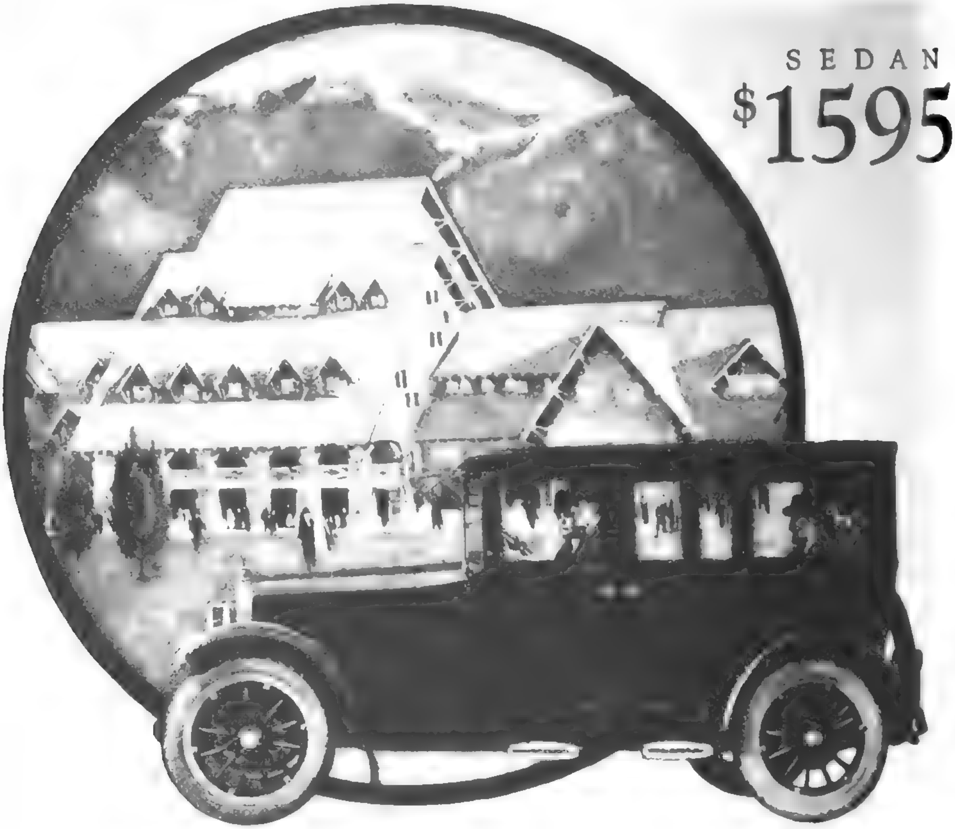

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Everybody's

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Illustrated with photographs

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The Bent Twig OCTAVUS ROY COHEN 138
A father's interesting experiment with his son

A Flash of Gold *A Serial* FRANCIS R. BELLAMY 147
A man's discovery and the redemption of a woman
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Everybody's Chimney Corner 173
Where reader, author and editor gather to talk things over

Prose and Worse GRIDLEY ADAMS 175

Everybody's Chestnut Tree 177

Cover Design RALPH DUNKELBERGER

NOTE—We regret that owing to lack of space it has been found impossible to include "Behind the Lines," by Hugh S. Martin, in this number, as announced last month. It will appear, however, in an early issue.

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and a few words by Bill Adams.

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Everybody's

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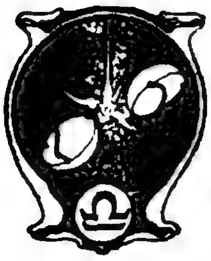

A Worth-while String of Pearls

THERE is such a very great deal one might talk about, and yet what is there that has not been said before by some one so much wiser than oneself?

Besides, to listen is so much more delightful. One can make no mistake if one has once learned to be a careful listener. The trouble is that so many folk are listeners of no judgment whatsoever, and might just as well be talking themselves as listening to the other poor blind man on his way to fall into the ditch. I like to listen, and would far rather be led into a deep ditch than would I lead some other man in who would follow my poor leadership.

This affair of becoming wise and of having a conceit of one's own, being confident in one's own ability, is a childish folly, is it not? And who is there of all of us who is fit to say to the other that he is wrong?

As far as I can see, about the only really worth-while string of pearls we may any of us have is a little string of fellow men who are our understanding friends.

Bill Adams.

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"He says, 'Come,'" said the pale young man. Rufe didn't rise. "I can't go out in the open festivities this way. I haven't shaved yet."

A Complete Novelette

White Hands Cling

By an Author Who Is Unexcelled in His Fictional Adventures in the Mystical East. Here We Have an Exuberant American and a Strange People Who Do Not Understand Him. Naturally, Queer Things Happen

By Will Levington Comfort

Illustrations by Ralph Pallen Coleman

RUFE HECKLING received a letter at Far Remesch which called him a second time to labors in the gardens of the amir, a ten days' journey by camel-back over the robber-infested Afghan pass. The fact that he didn't get to the capital is the point of this narrative; but Rufe certainly intended to. He had romped over a lot of central Asia in the past six years, altogether free of hand and foot, until a little over a year ago in the amir's gardens, when he met his great complication—a Circassian woman named Mirsamee. Before that, Rufe had never failed to make the East serve a Western nerve, and had never lost his laugh, which he enjoyed saying was made in Nebraska. He was still young enough to doubt that there could be conditions, even in the sleepy Orient, tough enough to turn him from a purpose which he set out upon.

His first job in the amir's gardens was to build a bridge over a little spur of the Indus that ran through them. Now he was called to "fashion" a temple in honor of the late Medu'ullah, prime minister to the amir, near the selfsame bridge which had risen in the gardens under his "supernatural hands," as the amir's secretary granted in the present letter.

"Merce!" Rufe called.

Mirsamee came now at the bidding of her own, came with the loveliness of a lotus lagoon upon her person and crumbs of an English pound-cake upon her cheek. She knelt to the floor by Mr. Heckling's chair and, hanging over one of his gaunt knees, listened while the letter was reread. Mirsamee had widely reflected Rufe's smile from the beginning, but now it was her eyes that widened. The red lips parted, a moan of horror from her throat:

"You will not go! O Lord of my Life—you will not go!"

"Sure, I'll go, Merce!"

"You will die! You will never reach the palace of the amir. Nay; you will never pass the robbers who lie in wait."

Rufe looked at her sideways. Life had been incredibly easy to live since Merce had come, but a man mustn't forget open country. A man mustn't go on building little bungalows in Far Remesch for a living and turn his back for good on the life he once thrived upon—the rough stuff that gave him the bounce and snap and the feel of a man. Rufe had to go, if only to find out afresh what he was leaving.

" 'Member how you took a chance, looking out from behind the amir's curtain?" he asked. "Well, that chance gave us all this—" Rufe waved his arm, apparently indicating the furniture in the bungalow.

"I've got to take a chance to keep all this—keep it going," he added. "They won't corner Rufus in boards up there and nail him down. I just can't feel it, Merce."

"I, who must wait, feel it in a sickness of fear, and the little son——"

Rufe had hoped she wouldn't get to that.

"Always missing the chance that he's a girl," he said, in a tone of one whom life had taught to expect little.

"Oh, no, no!" Mirsamee moaned. "You do not understand."

"Anyway, we need the money, Merce."

He picked her up in his arms in the easy way a man does who fancies he can fix a child's grief.

"How do you know," he demanded, "that I'm not grabbing a chance to escape so you won't tire of me?"

Mirsamee wept on, and not without charm, as she reminded him of the perils of perfidy at the amir's capital, and especially of the danger from Blackbeard's robbers at the pass, which was only half-way.

"Who was it cleaned up that little gang of bandits—and made them fetch and carry the amir's steelwork?"

"My lord broke and scattered the band, but it is never—clean!" Mirsamee moaned, with more knowledge than Rufe dreamed just then.

"Even if old Blackbeard is back on the job, I'm not going over the pass alone," he said. "There's a caravan of Persian-rug merchants leaving here in three days—fifty-odd camels. I'll ride with them to the capital."

THIS plan Mr. Heckling entered upon, but travel was very slow. It was mid-afternoon of the sixth day before the caravan approached the pass, a long, man-made lane through sun-charged and frost-cracked rocks, the dangerous part of the journey on account of the liability of robber raids in the narrows. This bit of mountain country was peculiarly massed with memories for Rufe Heckling, and the reason for this must be made clear before either the story or the caravan can proceed.

At a certain time, the work of bridge-building in the amir's gardens had been hung up badly by the delay of a shipment of steel pieces from Far Remesch. Word reached Rufe finally that the shipment was on the way. A few days later came the report that a band of Afghan robbers at the pass, under Blackbeard himself, had routed the freight caravan, driving off the camels and elephants and scattering the forged pieces of the bridge among the rocks and down the *khuds*.

Rufe refused to be stopped, though the amir already despaired of his bridge. He armed and mounted his entire labor gang at the capital and started for the pass with seventy camels. He divided his force into three parts, timing each closely to follow the other to the place where the freight caravan had been despoiled. The first party called the Afghan bandits into action, as Rufe had hoped. This little outfit did not draw rifles from the packs until the robbers were actually among them. Exchanging fire, the laborers then fell back, luring the Afghans into an encounter with the second party. In the thick of this skirmish, Rufe came in with his "third wing," and the massacre was on. What was left of the bandits turned tail. The reunited labor force followed in a drive straight to the robbers' stronghold. With explosives Rufe jarred the cave-entrances where the remnant was in hiding, and the whipped Afghans crawled forth. In the days that followed, the surviving bandits were forced to help in the work of recovering the steel pieces, which was mostly accomplished, but with great labor. The one thing that slightly darkened Rufe's large, fine attempt at the clean-up of the pass was the escape of the blackbearded Afghan who commanded the bandits, an interesting outlaw whom he saw face to face in the thick of the action—but not afterward.

And now as Mr. Heckling stared reminiscently up-trail from the pass, a high-pitched yell sounded and a score of horsemen appeared and swooped down upon the point of the caravan, a hundred yards in front of where Rufe rode. A dozen shots banged, and a second score of mounted Afghans followed the first into action. The course of several lives was changed by Mr. Heckling's curiosity at this point. The building of the temple to Medu'ullah in the gardens of the amir, moreover, was indefinitely postponed. Instead of waiting where he was, Rufe pressed his camel forward past the whimpering traders to the point of the caravan upon which the Afghans had closed. The shooting was but a harmless preliminary to a demand for tribute. The Persian caravan leader was already haggling with the bandits over terms when Rufe reached the van. Now the robber ranks opened for one of their party to come forward.

Rufe jumped, for the figure that appeared in a red robe was Blackbeard himself. Wearily, like a bored monarch, he assumed charge, glancing from face to face among the rug-men. Rufe fixed his shirt-collar, lowered his hat, covered his mouth with a reflective hand, but all the time he knew what would happen—that his own disquietude must inevitably attract Blackbeard's eye. So it happened—and with slow, astonishing effect. Blackbeard halted in the midst of a sentence, his dull eyes slowly taking crimson fire as they filled with Mr. Heckling's gaunt length. An egg-shaped hole appeared in the black beard—an opening for laughter, softly obscene. With his gaze still adhering to Rufe, the Afghan flattened one side of his nose with a slim, dark finger and doubled the price of his tribute.

Right now Rufe thought of Mirsamee, and the thought curiously crippled him. He didn't feel his nerve with him as he had in these mountains aforetime. He seemed slowed up by a caution altogether foreign in his life—a feminine whisper, saying, "Remember me—oh, remember the little son!" The Afghan still laughed—the laugh of a man whose enemy is delivered into his hands. He considered this a most excellent day; this day, indeed, was Allah all-potent and beneficent. He spoke.

The Persian caravan leader moaned, for the price of tribute had been raised again. Blackbeard hardly heard. He was indulging already in thought, a passion more poignant than the looting of caravans. He turned suddenly to his interpreter, a pale-faced young white man, and ordered him state to the Persian caravan leader that he had reconsidered and would permit the caravan to pass with the paying of a nominal tribute, but that one who traveled with the caravan must remain. The dark, thin finger pointed to Rufe. The leader of the Persians turned to the American.

"What is it they want of you?"

"One little slit across the throat—it looks to me," Rufe said lightly.

These words entirely covered the secret of Mr. Heckling's present feelings.

"We have our own lives to consider," the Persian went on.

"Sure you have!" said Rufe gently. He knew the Persian meant to sacrifice him, and he had no intention of asking the Persian not to. No; he wasn't going to let his old nerve break and demand the caravan to stick by him, but there didn't seem a chance for escape if Blackbeard took him on up to the caves. The darker his fears became now the more stubborn his will against asking a favor. He glanced at Blackbeard and up the stony slope toward the caves, then back at the caravan leader, and his eyes glittered with scorn.

"Also, we have to consider delay," the Persian was saying, "and the wares and properties of all these men."

"You sure do, little sir."

"But what shall we do?"

The tone of Rufe's answer was hard with the fight on in himself.

"I couldn't begin to say, not being a rug dealer," he said.

The Persian shrugged his shoulders and indicated to the nearer merchants that the tribute-money must be paid.

"That is it," he confessed pathetically. "We are traders, not fighting men."

RUFE wanted to laugh. He knew that a year ago under such circumstances he would have laughed, but he couldn't find a real laugh now—only a hard, tired smile. The rug-men were haggling out their tribute; and Rufe, ordered down from his camel to one of the led ponies of the robber band, presently watched the caravan move on without him. Then, at Blackbeard's side, a start was made up the slope, the sinking sun in Mr. Heckling's eyes. He was thinking how fresh he had been with Mirsamee's warnings and tears. A frightening laugh was visible under the beard of the robber chief. He looked ecstatically happy, as if some dream were coming true. This dream was revenge upon the white man who had spoiled his band more than a year ago. The passion for revenge was difficult for Rufe to grasp, especially since he was the object. Presently he turned to the outlaw chief.

"Say, Disraeli—what are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"Dis-riz-is?" Blackbeard questioned, with gleaming eyes.

"Not 'riz-is'— raeli."

"Bubbub!" the Afghan growled, turning back to the interpreter, who had ridden behind so far.

Rufe met this young man's eyes now, a fixed and mournful stare. The pale young man had ridden up between them at the Afghan's word, and now inquired of Mr. Heckling,

"The chief wishes to know what question you asked."

"So you are his interpreter?"

"I have been preempted as such."

"Your name Bubbub?"

"My name is Bulwur."

"Bulwur, not Bubbub," Rufe mused. "And how did you get your job, mister?"

"It would be well for me first to tell the chief what you asked," the young man said, and the mourning was deep in his eyes.

"Oh, it doesn't matter. I merely inquired what he was going to do with me."

"I shall state that to him now."

The interpreter spoke only one sentence to the chief, but it certainly contained the dynamics to rouse. Blackbeard laughed; he intoned; he caught one-half of his beard and pointed it straight at Rufe; he leaned from the saddle and touched Rufe's elbow-joint and throat with embarrassing delicacies of attention; he became copious with gestures and diagrams having to do with the American's frame.

"I draw he's going to do a whole lot with me," Rufe said.

"It is not all planned yet," Bulwur answered. "At the last, he says you are to be torn apart by four ponies."

"M-mm," came from Rufe. "I've always been curious to see that done. Tell him I'll be there."

Bulwur stared at him and slowly passed his hand over his brow. Then he spoke to the Afghan, apparently stating what the prisoner had said. Now Blackbeard halted his pony, the dawning of a deep dread in his eyes. He, too, stared at the American, the mysterious dread becoming more fixed. He spoke, but Bulwur didn't interpret.

"Why don't you give down what he said?" Rufe asked. "Have I hurt his feelings?"

"Is your mind quite well?" Bulwur inquired.

"Only feeble," said Rufe.

Bulwur turned to speak to the outlaw.

Gray flecks slowly appeared in the latter's cheeks. His lips moved in protest and fury.

"He is not to be comforted," the interpreter said.

"Now, that's too bad. What have I gone and done?"

"It is not clear to me. It has to do with his religion."

Mr. Heckling appeared softly gay. He didn't know why, but there seemed something about his own whimsical manner that horribly disturbed Blackbeard. Rufe concluded this must be to his own advantage.

"So that mountain-pirate's got a religion," he observed slowly, and added, "You didn't tell me why he called you Bubbub."

"He does not. It is an expression of the vernacular, designed to attract one's attention—especially the attention of a subordinate. Many months ago I was traveling by caravan, even as you—traveling to the hills on my mission. As your caravan was stopped back at the pass, it was so even with mine, and tribute demanded. That also was a caravan of returning rug-men, and there was none who talked the dialect of this Afghan save myself. I dealt between him and the leader of that caravan. For doing so, I was taken as part of the tribute, even as you."

THERE were sounds of muttering from Blackbeard at this point. He was not disturbed by the low talk of the two white men. His lips moved with a mysterious grievance of his own.

"Some awful thing is on his mind," Rufe suggested.

"He says you came here before, and that you had the look then of one crazed."

"Mild, said Rufus; "always mild."

He studied Bulwur now as a forlorn hope. The young man seemed to have a laughless honesty and an impersonal detachment altogether new to Rufe's world.

"What did you say you were traveling to the hills for—that mission of yours?"

"I am on my way to find the Brothers."

"What brothers might they be?"

"You have not heard of the Mystic Order of White Brothers?"

"Masons?" said Mr. Heckling.

"Ah, not—it is not like that—a monastic order of holy men."

"I haven't heard of that outfit. And what were you going to do when you got there? Were you sent for?"

"Only from within," said Bulwur, placing a frail hand upon his chest.

Rufe gave him a quick glance.

"Oh, sure!" he said.

"When there are no caravans, I am permitted to carry on my studies here," Bulwur added.

"Doesn't it irk you—this living with a pirate gang—a pious young man like you?"

"Nothing merely happens, sir. There is good to come to me from the days of this life. I have taken it as one of the prelimimary ordeals of my novitiate—to be detained here."

"You think the big brothers have an eye on you right now?" Rufe said socially.

"Oh, yes."

Mr. Heckling wiped his brow slowly as if to unveil a vagueness there. The Afghan still communed bitterly with himself as they rode on. Rufe was occupied with the puzzle of the pale, unemotional young man. He couldn't get Bulwur straight.

"Honest," he said; "aren't you in with this here body politic—no share in the loot?"

"All men are my brothers," said Bulwur, "but I have no part in worldly traffic. I am in this body, but not of it."

"Say—what are you—American?"

"I have never seen America," the young man said, with a trace of feeling. "It seems that you bring something of America to me I have never known."

"Nebraska," said Rufe.

"Something of America that I need to know," Bulwur repeated. "My parents were from America. They were missionaries to Persia. They were very young when they died—together. I remember them praying—that is all. My own years have been in India—awaiting my call and preparing."

Rufe spoke softly to himself after a moment.

"There isn't a hell of a lot of humor up here at the pass, but religion's working triple-shift. If I was only an exhorter or a singing evangelist!"

FOR two hours after the sun went down that night, Rufe sat at the mouth of one of the caves with six of the Afghan band that had been chosen for his guard. Firelight was upon their faces, the lust of the feast in their eyes. On the central fire, fed with great slabs of deodar bark, was a huge pot, from which issued a soft roar of continuous boiling, also an oily aroma from the half of a fat-tailed sheep gradually settling and softening down into a jelly of stew.

The bearded chief supped along with his women; the white-faced interpreter was apart with his handful of dates, a fleshless supper, his firelight not for the stewing of meat but to lift into light the print of a little book. Rufe could see that sad, serious face in a distant flicker—eyes turned down to the page, then lifted, all empty of the world, in meditation.

Rufe was critical and lonesome. It was too much his party. The six of the band jostled him, piled over him, as if he had been a tethered sheep. They turned to him neither for comment nor acquiescence. They granted him as one dead already, quite as they would a sheep already trussed for to-morrow's pot. They drowsed by the reddening fire, save two who came near, their faces gleaming as if rubbed with complexion-cream. These were Rufe's immediate sentries. They spread his rug between them and kept up a sharp calling across his body as one after the other nodded. Thus they tormented each other to stay awake.

Mirsamee haunted him as he sank asleep. She would draw near to him on that border between waking and the deeps of sleep which no man knows. Sometimes she seemed bending over her brazier; sometimes she opened her arms, or served him tea and cakes, or nestled or whispered or laughed or combed her hair—always the woman of a single art, to have and hold the heart of one man; and always in her eyes Rufe could see the mystery that meant the babe which she prayed to be a boy. What disgusted Mr. Heckling was that the more he thought of Mirsamee the more his nerve dwindled away—that sound, reliable nerve with a laugh to it which he always had said was made in Nebraska. He slept in snatches like an old man who has no vitality to be fed by the earth and whose sickness keeps pestering him back to dull wakefulness.

Next morning, as the sun warmed the cave-mouths, Rufe perceived that this was his May-day, and he was more than a flower-girl. Blackbeard and his pale young interpreter approached. Bulwur's eyes were steadier and sadder than ever as he carried the volumes of the bearded one's talk into brief bits of academic English. All Rufe knew in his desperation was to speak and act the opposite. In an easy, confidential tone he inquired of Bulwur what Blackbeard's immediate plan was.

"He means to inflict pain upon your body," the interpreter said. "You are to be taken up to the white rock and tried with the fire. He says his fears of yesterday were groundless—that you *are* fit for torture."

Rufe was troubled with an irritating cough at this point.

"This altitude always gets me in the neck," he explained. "What were his fears of yesterday?"

"Through the watches of the night I have prayed for understanding," Bulwur said. "Full light has not been vouchsafed to me; only this—that you are not to die to-day."

"Bubbub!" came from the Afghan, then a flow of words.

"He says, 'Come,' " said the pale young man.

Rufe didn't rise.

"I can't go out in the open festivities this way. I haven't shaved yet."

"I will explain," said Bulwur.

First anger, then a trace of yesterday's dread showed in the eyes above the shadows of beard, then loud, snappy talk and sustained.

"He says imperatively that you are to rise and come," Bulwur interpreted sadly.

Rufe bent to tighten the laces of his boots. The Afghan's voice droned on. He did not seem to address any one—merely to commune with Allah or Fate in voice of mournful protest with occasional savage intonations of revolt.

"What's he getting at?" Rufe asked.

"It is not plain to me. He keeps repeating that he fears the worst has befallen."

"You don't know what the worst is?"

"No. It has not come to words."

"You might get me a line on it as soon as you can," Rufe said whimsically.

The pale young man bowed. His tacit acquiescence was curious to Rufe.

"Say, Bull," he said, suddenly rising; "are you with me—pro or con?"

"I am against no man. I am for you, and also for our dark brother here. He, too, shall be restored."

"That's handsome of you; but Brother Diz ought not to be encouraged in this torture business. It isn't moral."

"Peace and courage, my friend!"

THE Afghan led the way up a rocky path that was still shadowed. The six sentries followed at a little distance. Rufe slowly sickened. There didn't seem to be anything to tie to in this world, nothing to grip a nerve to. He felt alone and inadequate; but the presence of Bulwur had this queer effect: it kept him from getting mad, and without getting mad he couldn't start anything.

They climbed to the sun, where the heat of the day was already strong. A huge white flat rock showed like a table-top a few inches above the soil. Blackbeard sat down close beside it; his men raised a blanket shelter over his head, but not so as to cast a shadow upon the rock. All this was done in a leisurely manner under the direction of the chief, who glanced frequently at the sun while making his arrangements. An urn of steaming coffee was placed beside him; a box of pigments and brushes, opened. Members of Blackbeard's band strolled up the trail and gathered about at a little distance, like cattlemen on an off day.

Now the moment had come when Rufe was required for the proceedings—the most bewildering moment he had ever known in some ways. The six sentries closed in upon him. The face of Bulwur haunted him. The burning eyes seemed to be pouring a sort of foreign non-resistance upon his mind and all its faculties. It is true that to resist would have counted for nothing save a hasty finish, but this would have been Rufe's way aforetime. In fact, he would likely have fallen to violence now, except for the pale young white man's eyes.

The fact stands out that the moment passed; after that there was no chance for resistance. His wrists and ankles were noosed, but not bound together. Belated hell woke in Rufe's heart as they took off his clothing. Then, standing off, the six yanked him by the cords to the rock where Blackbeard sat under his blanket shelter. They stretched him, back down, upon the warm stone and staked him out with four ropes, his body pulled straight along the line of shadow marked by the chief's shelter, but altogether in the sun. Bulwur came nearer, his eyes shadowed by his helmet, but marvelously alive. Blackbeard's face, now bending close to his, held a picture of human perversion that was printing itself on some inner scroll of Rufe Heckling for permanent use.

From a long horn case under his red robe Blackbeard drew a Russian cigarette and held it out in his lips for a servant to hold a charcoal. Then, with only his hands in the sunlight, he dipped his brush in a shallow saucer of green pigment and water and began to make lines of paint on his prisoner's chest. Rufe shut the sun from his eyes. The sweat had started from his taut body. The stone bit into his back and hips; the drying paint began to draw and itch.

He heard the laughing of the bandits gathering closer about, but not close enough to touch his body with their shadows. They were laughing at the thing the chief drew. They shut off the face of Bulwur from time to time. Rufe didn't realize how he kept looking for Bulwur's face. Now there was an interruption—a messenger from the camp below. The messenger spoke to Bulwur, who repeated for the chief. Blackbeard swallowed in an absorbed way, then growled a negative which brought a dithering of pleased laughter from his men. The chief had not turned his eyes from his work. Now Rufe heard Bulwur speaking to him alone—English words spoken mournfully.

"A caravan has been sighted, but the chief has refused to break his holiday. O my friend, if yours is the courage of America, great is the manhood of my country which I have never seen! My service to you—my service to you!"

Something in the tone stayed the mad strain, though surges of rage and shame leaped into Rufe's brain like surf against a rock. Hells were opened within him that do not go with a creature that walks erect. He held his eyelids shut and tightened his lips white against the violence of their trembling. His fingers jerked loosely, for the thongs held him rigid only to the wrists. He tried everything to keep from crying out. Suddenly it was like a burning needle at his flesh, a thin shaft of fire that seemed to find his heart. His whole body winced, and there was a low, rapturous gurgle from the chief.

Rufe opened his eyes to see in the steady black hand a burning-lens held above his flesh. It *had been* a needle, but intangible—a tiny needle-shaft of violet fire. The painting in green was finished; the figure, or symbol, was now to be marked in with focalized sunlight.

A while after that, Rufe's senses rocked. The stone upon which he lay seemed to have become a small boat—Mr. Heckling on high seas. Mirsamee came walking across the water. It was a boy—yes; a boy child that she held up——

He was just slipping away into a delicious darkness when the fire-needle bit deeply a last time. There was a fraction of an instant when it was a toss-up whether he would scream or laugh, and Rufe Heckling's soul or something chose to laugh.

The chief leaped up with a deep-dipped Eastern oath. His protesting voice ranged higher and higher. Now Bulwur's tones reached the tortured one; then all went dull and easy for the man on the rock.

RUFE came up to consciousness through battle-lines of pain. Memory woke in his racked head. His body had little or no covering. The last he knew he had been staked out on a white rock, but this was cool shadow. He was in one of the caves, lying upon a rug stretched upon a smooth floor of stone. An Afghan sentry was sitting in the oval of the cave-mouth. He didn't remember being carried here. He must have fainted from pain out on the rock. Of course it was that Blackbeard had laid off for the day, there being no point in torturing one who is unconscious. He, Rufus Heckling, would doubtless be taken out for more burning to-morrow. Oh, no; he wouldn't! They would never get a noose on his limbs again, not while he was alive. Bulwur had hypnotized him, or they wouldn't have roped him once.

He was athirst. His whole flesh softly flamed from sunburn, but there was a spot of biting cold on his breast where the burning-glass had wrought. Waves of sickness, waves of weakness and, back of all, thirst and a slow steady seething of murderous hatred! This last was steady, like the passion for Mirsamee and his house in Far Remesch. He had been slow to anger, but his anger now reached deep and far. He was less than sane. The sentry at the cave-mouth moved. Rufe's rage fixed itself for the moment on that figure, then spread out over the others. It was directed as much toward Bulwur now as toward Blackbeard himself. That steady, mysterious look of Bulwur's had kept him from resistance. He would have been dead and well out of it all now but for that. It was fixed in his mind that Blackbeard meant to go on with his torture when he woke.

He heard voices and pushed himself up from the rug with his hands. If they were coming for him, they would find a customer right now. The entrance darkened, the Afghan chief and others entering. As usual, Blackbeard was talking as he came forward in the dim light, Bulwur walking behind him. The great lean frame of Rufe Heckling lifted to its feet, swaying. His arms reached for the rock walls, which were not near. A slow, deadly smile settled on his swollen lips. He was like a beast whose lair is violated. Vaguely in English the words reached him:

"Peace, brother! The one you call Disraeli is driving you out—peace!"

Rufe cackled softly, his eyes darting from face to face before him. Two of the bandits were slipping behind him; the others stepped aside, leaving the mouth of the cave unobstructed. Above the din of the Afghan's stream of talk the voice in English reached him again.

"Make your way to the opening—make your way!"

A whip-lash darted at him from behind. Rufe kept turning and turning as he backed out. His limbs caved from momentary weakness and he went to his knees, but was up again. Blackbeard and his men stepped back from the entrance, leaving Rufe free to emerge. Close to the opening, the idea gripped him that he was to be seized as he stepped out. He dropped low, like a rodent, to peer round the edge of rock. The opening was clear. The whip-lash flicked him nastily on the thigh. Blackbeard's laugh came to him back from the dark. The red of violence filled Rufe's eyes as his glance fell upon the green markings on his body, though he did not understand their purport.

"You'll see that color-scheme at your finish!" he called into the cave.

"Peace, brother; go your way! To the caravan-track—go your way!"

Rufe stood in the vivid light six or seven feet from the cave-mouth. He didn't believe that he was being driven out of camp. He thought he was being somehow tricked to the torture-rock again. He saw the trail which led up to the white rock, the trail which led down to the caravan highway from Far Remesch. Now Blackbeard was in the cave-mouth, bent forward to emerge. Rufe hurled himself at the bowed figure with a laughing yell:

"A snake strikes his own length!"

Blackbeard had jerked back. Rufe picked himself up, with the end of the robber's robe in his hands. He yanked at it, but only a piece of red silk came.

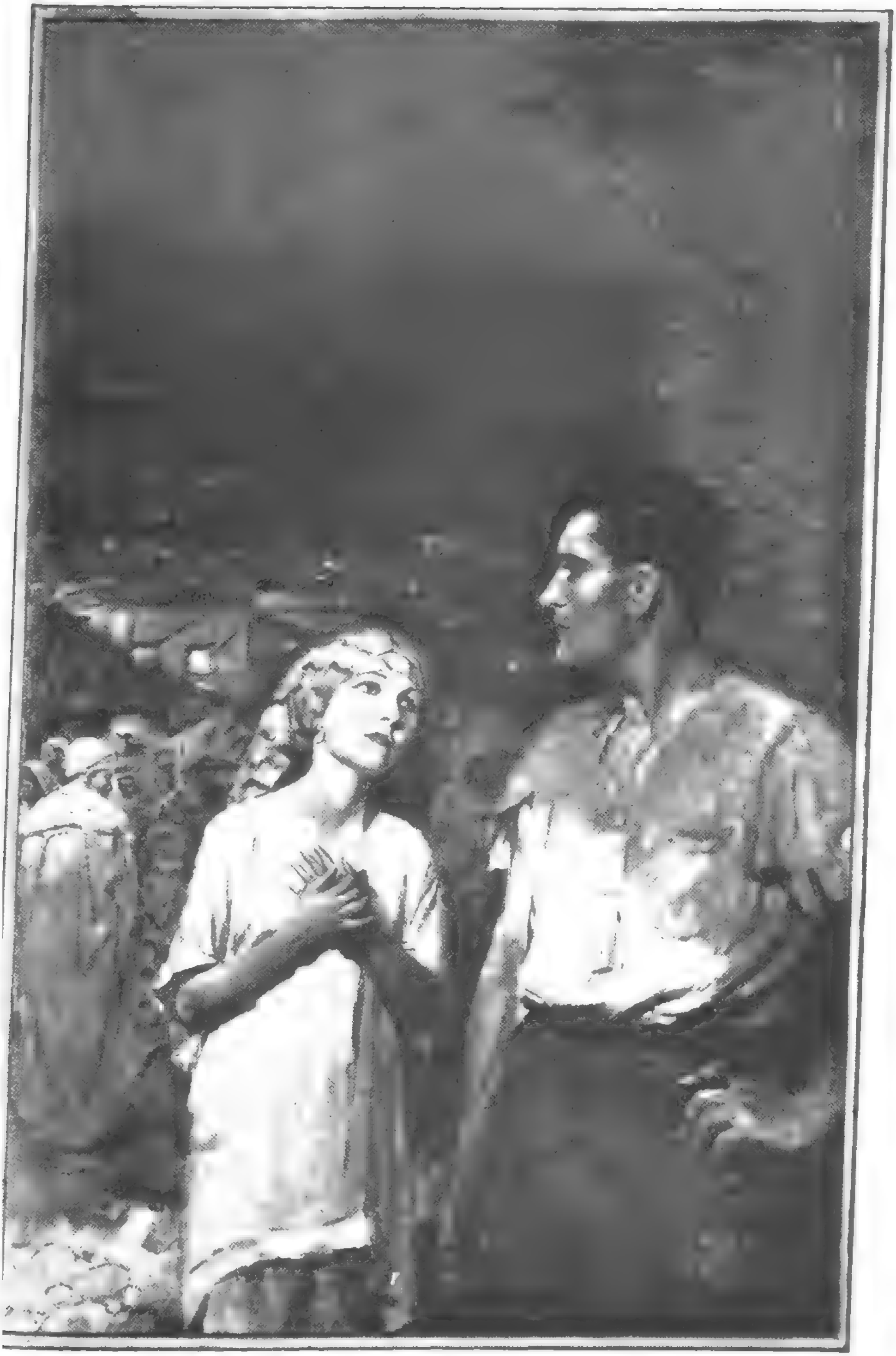
"I'll get your beard later on," he muttered.

"Go your way! To think of vengeance binds you to our brother's misfortune!"

" 'Brother' is good!" Rufe jeered, turning down toward the caravan road, because it was the only open way. A shower of stones littered after him. He heard Blackbeard's voice. He was free, but could not understand. The sunlight on his head crushed the sense out of him. He lifted the red robe to cover his head from the rays. His thirst burned. In leaving camp, he was leaving water. The desperate meaning of the whole rock-strewn valley before his eyes was: "No water; no water!" —black letters of despair.

HIS bare feet bled; strange words were thickly tongued in his mouth. For hours the scorched body in the covering of a torn red robe picked the way crazily down-trail. At times Rufe's hands groped to push away phantoms that moved before his eyes; at times he fell, but the hot rocks would not let him rest. The shepherd's hut which filled his eyes at last seemed part of the illusion. He neared it, stood in its shadow, touched its unhewn logs before he would believe. A bent old native woman appeared in the door.

Rufe made for her across the threshold, patting his protruding tongue crazily with his finger. She was too frightened or too



They turned to each other on the door-step. "But the temple of the amir?" she breathed, shuddering. "Lord! I didn't get there—only to the pass."

crippled to move quickly. He caught her arm; her shoulder sagged under his weight. She led him to the earthen floor and hobbled away. He called after her and wept. The touch of her—the human touch of her had resolved his last strength. But she came back with a brimming gourd. He drank and moaned, and it was dark.

RUFE woke with dawn coming in. Twelve hours he had lain, his strength stealing back. His first idea was that Blackbeard and his men would be after him; his second was that he had to get even some way, or not to go home to Far Remesch—a point of honor. His feet were a wreck but he made them work. He rose and drained two small jars of goat's milk the woman had left upon a bench. Then he left the cabin and started back up the trail, now touched with morning glow. The old woman called after him, but his only answer was a back-flung arm. He climbed upon a great rock that overhung the trail leading up to the Afghan's camp. On top he gathered together huge boulders, still cool from the night, placing them near the edge ready to heave down. In his work he missed entirely the single figure that slipped past below.

When the daylight was full, Bulwur paused at the threshold of the hill cabin and inquired of the old woman if she had seen a white man in a red robe.

"O stranger, what have I not seen?" she asked in return. "A word of filth in green lettering upon his breast and a bone-deep burn?"

"That is the man. Where is he now?"

"Come—and I will show you where he passed the night. It was here that he lay like a wounded *nilghai* in the thresh of torment. This is blood from his feet. These are the jars of water and milk he emptied. Is he holy—this terrible stranger who cried out in pain through the night?"

"Yes; holy, my little mother. His sufferings are the envy of the gods; but which way did he go?"

She pointed up the trail toward the robber camp.

"Surely not," said the white man. "I have just come from the heights, and the face of the stranger was turned downward toward the pass when last I looked."

"It is true that he descended in the late sun of yesterday and fell weeping into these withered arms, as unto a bride. It is true that he drank with terrible cries of pain, and after that his eyes knew me no more for a living thing. Also, in the first light of this day, he returned the steep way he had come."

"I must find him," said Bulwur.

"But will you not rest and drink? One day more have the goats blessed me with their yield."

"I will return with him and may peace rest with thee, O thou who keep house upon the bitter road."

Up Bulwur went, calling. Soon above his head he heard words and low laughter.

"Come on; I am waiting. Come on, you *brother!* Are Blackbeard and the rest hiding behind?"

"I came alone," Bulwur answered. "I came to bring you service. I came alone in the night, for I have seen as in a vision that my service is to you—even to your own door in Far Remesch."

A face that smiled a tortured smile looked down upon him.

"I'll have to be hard on you, Bull, if you're fooling me again."

"Your heart is too brave, my friend, to speak words of doubt for me, though you have indeed suffered much. Give me your hand. And why do you wait here in the rising sun?"

Rufe wiped his eyes and drew the red robe closer over his head, pointing to the scarred line of the robbers' trail upon the rocks below. Also, he pointed to the loose boulders at the edge of the great rock.

"I'll get them when they pass below," he said wearily. "No; I can't get you straight. You fooled me up there—when I let them stake me out. You made me take that scorching without a fight."

"Your life would have forfeited to their knives if you had given them fight. There is goat's milk in the cabin for you. Then to the very door of your house in Far Remesch I shall go with you. Come!"

Rufe's mouth twitched. He opened his robe and showed the green paint and the wet black burn, muttering his will to return hate for hate and hurt for hurt.

"It is the boy in you that speaks of vengeance, but I have seen the man," Bulwur said slowly. "Indeed I have seen the man in you endure pain and laugh instead of crying out. That courage is for me to serve. To repay a hurt with a hurt is to prepare for hurt again. And do you not see that the Afghan is beside himself?" It is braver to leave vengeance to the gods."

Rufe's head rocked dizzily.

"Don't look at me that way again, Bull. It was that that made me take their ropes yesterday—or was it last week?"

"It is but the look of my allegiance to you that you see. It was yesterday. I followed you last night under the cover of darkness. Come; we must hasten. The Afghans will have missed me by this time. Yes; that which you see in my eyes is the look of a child to a man. A man I have seen—a man from *my* country—a man who laughs——"

"But why did they drive me out?"

"It was your laugh on the rock. It convinced the one you called Disraeli—against the dearest hope of his heart. It convinced him that you were a madman and must not be tortured." A hoarse sound from Rufe's throat, distantly like a chuckle. "It is part of his religion that idiots and the insane must be guarded against themselves," Bulwur added. "It was your words of levity at the time of the capture and as we rode up from the caravan that disturbed him first—a fear, even then, that his religion forbade him the joy of torturing his enemy. But he stifled his fears until—on the rock—you laughed."

"Aren't they following?"

"I do not know. Come!"

RUFE'S resistance slowly melted. Heavy on Bulwur's arm, he was helped down to the cabin where he emptied another jar of milk, and suffered his feet to be washed and bound, and his head wound in a white turban made from the sieve-cloths of the woman's dairy.

She asked not money as the two white men departed—though Bulwur emptied fourth part of his pouch into her hands—but only asked the blessing of the holy man whose sufferings were the envy of the gods.

"Blessing!" said Rufe. "I'll give her one from Nebraska." And he caught the little old creature in his arms and kissed her.

Then, as rapidly as possible, they went down the trail to the caravan tracks and turned south to Far Remesch. The rest of that day they journeyed and the next—Rufe driving his body through storms of fatigue and fever and pain. For the great thing in him had risen and held his eyes like a star in the East; and that was the light of his own doorway.

"You'll see her, little man!" he would mutter. "You'll see her soon, Bull! You'll see what all your gods are worth—when you look upon a woman on the door-step! You'll forget your brother masons and go out and find you one——"

"I will take you there—to—even to your door-step," Bulwur always repeated.

On the third day a caravan overtook them. The rest was the rack and the roll of camel-back and the city in the night.

"Nearly there, Bull—just a street beyond. And isn't it still, and isn't it blue in the streets? And this is the smell of a town——"

Then Bulwur heard a woman's cry.

"I cannot enter," he repeated quietly. "My work is done. I am not overstrong. Your heaven is here, my brother. Mine is far—far in the hills!"

"My God, he means it!" Rufe breathed.

"Yes; and I take with me that which I had not before. I take the story of America to the Brothers—if from such as I, they will listen. I take a glimpse of the religion of laughter—the spirit of laughter against any pain. Ah, America, which I have never seen, you have come to live with me in the spirit of my friend!"

"The little old States would never know herself by your picture, Bull, but she's sure got the viscera, as you say. Just one cup of little Merce's tea."

"And I take with me to the Brothers," the young mystic went on, "a light on the mystery of a woman who waits for a man—not for me, but for my friend. I shall not forget. May the third who comes be the light of both your eyes!"

Mirsamee laughed and cried.

They watched him go against the lights of the city. They turned to each other at the door-step.

"But the temple for the amir?" she breathed, shuddering.

"Lord! I didn't get there—only to the pass. No, Merce; I'm not going back—until the amir sends his army for a convoy."

Mirsamee closed the door.

"Your body trembles. Ah, come!" she said. "Come—the door is shut—to me and rest!"

Everybody's Magazine, September, 1922

The New House

Nothing so Appealing as the Love, the Struggles, the Courage of a Young Couple, Particularly When They're a Bit Old-fashioned, and When an Understanding Author Portrays Them

By Helen Redington

WHAT a tool-chest is to a boy and her first real doll to a girl, what Montmartre is to the artist and the Arabian desert to the archeologist, that her new house is to the bride.

Into its designing and furnishing she builds her dreams. All that she was born for focuses here. Toward this moment she has come straight out of the infinite. Not marriage itself is so important to her. Her husband, the honeymoon over, settles relievedly to the real business of living. But she, she is scene-painting for the play she will presently stage. On her choice of curtain-material depends the rightness of her future accomplishment. She is building her nest.

Wesley Ames was eight years old before his mother surrendered finally her dream of home-making.

She had married Calvin Ames against her judgment, without due preparation. His urgency had somehow prevailed over her more orderly scheme of things.

"But where could we live?" had been her last feeble barrier, burned down in the fire of his need for possession.

"Oh, anywhere. There's the old homestead," he half-laughingly suggested, meaning a log cabin long since abandoned by the house of Ames. "We'd camp out in it while we built our own place. You'd get things just as you wanted if you were on hand every moment to boss the job. Marry me now, honey. Don't make me wait."

And they had gone to housekeeping in the old log cabin—a quaint thing to do pronounced their friends, admiring their spirit, half envying them their daring. Laura had felt almost a heroine, a little scornful of the conventional-minded, who waited for their bungalows to be built—bungalows that were all of a pattern, two bedrooms and bath on a tiny hallway separated from the main suite of living-room, dining-room and kitchen. She inspected these establishments, exclaimed at the originality that raised or lowered the kitchen sink in accordance with the housewife's inches, or built in a cubby-hole for the ironing-board. Then she returned to her own vine-covered cabin, swung back its rickety gate, followed its grass-grown brick walk to the great flat stone that served as door-step, and knew herself for a pioneer.

A year passed, and another. And Calvin Ames was content in his cabin. The living-room was large and comfortable, not cluttered with furniture, as were those of his friends. The great fireplace took logs no other in town could hold. Rag rugs covered the old pine floor. The shaded lamp, glowing in the center of the supper-table, welcomed him and soothed him. Sometimes wages were low and it would have been foolish to deplete their slender margin of savings at such a time. Then again they were high, and he couldn't afford to forfeit his chance to get ahead by starting to build. Wesley was born, and that was an added expense. Besides, what was the matter with the cabin?

And year by year Laura Ames had withdrawn from her associates. She was no longer a heroic figure. She was a subject for smiles, concealed or not according to the kind-heartedness of the listeners, when she let slip her accustomed phrases about the house they were going to build. The end of this period of his life—the end of his babyhood, in fact—came when Wesley was eight. He never forgot it.

It was not the only time he had heard his mother and father quarreling about the house. But he gradually came to realize that it was this particular quarrel that changed his mother. Before, there had been flashes of gaiety, of beauty, of irresponsible laughter. After, she had become as drab as was her weather-beaten cabin. She came to dress merely that she might be covered, not adorned. Her heavy hair was twisted tight, to be out of her way, not softly to reveal its loveliness. Escaping wisps were impatiently brushed and pinned back. Something in his mother had surely died upon the occasion of that particular quarrel. Yet it had begun as had so many before it.

"You mean," Laura Ames had said finally, "that you aren't planning to build—ever?"

"Oh—ever—" His father had shrugged.

"But you've stopped planning on it," she had persisted.

"For God's sake, Laura"—Calvin Ames had grown angry—"quit nagging! How can I plan on it? With this paving assessment to meet?"

"You were going to build the summer we were married." She offered this as a statement, not an argument.

"You know why I didn't. Wages were high then. I couldn't afford to let good jobs go by while I puttered about on a place for us. We were comfortable enough."

"Oh, comfortable!" But she let that go. "And when wages were low——"

"There you go again! With the boy to buy fussy do-dads for, and money scarce, you'd have had me spend instead of earn."

"I didn't mind so much," she conceded, "when it was Wesley's coming that put it off."

"Yes; and you had to name him 'Wesley!'" The man had reopened another old wound.

"I didn't want him to be another Calvin—hard, like you," she threw back at him.

"Well, there's never been money enough on hand to waste on a house, and I don't know that there ever will be." And that ended the discussion.

At first, when Wesley realized that his mother no longer reopened the subject, he was relieved. Like his father, he thought the old house good enough. But slowly he came to know that, with the closing of the subject, something else in his mother had closed—something that he knew must somehow be reopened if the old, comfortable, homelike feeling was to come again. Hence his boyish resolve—when he grew up, he would build his mother her house.

And in its wake followed renunciation. His had been a lonely youth, for the family isolation extended to him. "The Ames boy" was never one of "the crowd." One girl, Lee Carstens, cast inquisitive eyes upon him and offered him fellowship which his shyness did not know how to accept.

Perhaps his most difficult moment came when Professor Barber secured for him, without his knowledge, the fellowship that would have made college possible.

"You refuse? You mean to tell me—" The professor had quite choked with rage.

"I'd like it," Wesley had managed to stammer, "but I haven't time. I've got to learn to be a carpenter. And I've got to begin to make money." He hoped the professor would understand.

He hadn't, of course.

"Young fool!" the man had fumed, really disappointed, for Wesley's work was of unusual quality. "Mad for money! What can it buy you? Tell me that. So you can't spare four years out of a lifetime to make your everlasting soul fit to live with? And, for heaven's sake, why carpentry?"

"I'll need it," was all Wesley could find to say.

And the man had swung on his heel and left the boy to spoil his life in his own way. And Wesley had come to see that it might have been wiser to accept the fellowship. He had not known then how much there was to learn before he could accomplish that to which he had set his hand. All his evenings given to correspondence courses hardly sufficed. So to the difficulty of that particular renunciation was added the poignant realization that it had been needless. He had hindered, not hastened, the accomplishment of his desire.

But finally his hour came, brought about in the end by sheer luck. On a lonely Sunday-afternoon ramble, he had crossed a ravine just south of town, scrambling through underbrush that tore at his clothes, balancing precariously on fallen tree-trunks in lieu of bridges. Tum Water Hill, the Indians had named this spot, and when Wesley reached its top, he knew where he wanted to build his new home—an elevated, level stretch of timbered land, a low range of hills for background, Tum Water Creek winding its shining way at its foot.

THE next day he broached his project to Nat Carstens, his employer, a man with a finger in most of the town's industries, but liking best his contracting and real-estate-promotion schemes. With him, Wesley had become not only a first-class carpenter, with a smattering of practical architectural experience to add to his correspondence-school information; he had acquired Nat Carsten's habit of dreaming with Windy Meadows as the subject of the dream. He saw the town that was to be, and he wanted a place in its making.

"Bridge the ravine, and it is accessible," said Wesley. "It's level, with natural drainage. And there's a view." Only that by way of plea. Yet Nat Carstens looked at him for a moment from under bushy eyebrows, with a gleam in his clear blue eyes.

"I'll look into it," he grunted. And Wesley turned away, satisfied..

So was the promotion of Tum Water Hill as a residence section for Windy Meadows inaugurated. It took time and manipulation to get the bridge. After that, it was simple. And for his part in the scheme, Wesley Ames was given his lot of the three pines. It was not the choice lot of the tract, but it was on that spot that the idea had come to him. It was there that he wanted to build his house.

And soon he was spending his Saturday afternoons, his Sundays, though Windy Meadows did not approve of Sabbath desecration, and the long summer evenings, digging his cellar, planning his house.

He was thus occupied late one Saturday when a small gray roadster poked its inquisitive nose well within the circle of his pine trees. Streets as yet were no more than surveyors' lines. Out from under the steering-wheel scrambled Lee Carstens and came to sit on the grassy edge of his excavation.

"Hello, Wesley!" said she whom he knew not at all, had not exchanged more than passing greetings with since the old high-school days.

The young man stopped his work and stood silently, awkwardly before her. His black eyes tried to meet her shining green-flecked ones and could not. He didn't know what to say, and so, as usual, he said nothing at all.

"Father says," began Lee straightway, "that you're his one best bet. *I* didn't know you'd been studying and studying all this time. Why didn't I know? Wesley, it does seem to me you've been secretive." Small, round, dimpled, in bright green-silk sweater and cap, Lee's eyes dared him to find her pretty. Granted by nature the easy spoils of the flesh, she longed, with the perversity that makes of man a human and progressing animal, for the fruits of the spirit. Born for persuasion, she wanted to rule by reason.

"Father says," continued the girl, as one who chants a hero's battle-saga, "you're going to be the best contractor and promoter in Windy Meadows, and he's glad you're working for him and not against him. He says—" The shadow gleam of a smile crept into Wesley's eyes. "Well, perhaps I am exaggerating," Lee admitted, in response to that look. "But he did say that he was a fool not to have thought of the Tum Water Hill scheme himself. And *I* think it's time you stopped being a hermit and played with the rest of us a little. Is it fun to dig? Let me."

And, smearing herself from head to heels with clay, she slid down into the pit he was digging. Before he could hinder, she seized the shovel from his lax grasp and buried its blade in the soft earth.

"No," said he then; "it's too heavy."

And when she still tugged and pried, he grasped the wooden handle well down on the haft.

And if he did not understand the look that flashed in the gray eyes, it was not surprising. How could he have known that he was the one man of Lee Carstens' acquaintance who would not have taken this opportunity to lay his hand over hers upon that shovel-handle?

"It is heavy work," she conceded, yielding him not only the disputed tool but a rare deepening of the despised dimples. "You'll never finish it alone."

"I'll have to," he explained. "Every workman in town is tied up." And he nodded toward the scaffoldings showing here and there against the sky-line. Nat Carstens was pushing the project.

Lee Carstens' mouth set so firmly as almost to straighten out its upturned corners. It was another of her peculiarities that Wesley, not knowing, had brushed against. No one ever told Lee a thing could not be done unless he meant her to take the statement as a dare.

"How am I going to get out?" she demanded, gray eyes innocently upturned.

The next second she was lying across his arms, held shoulder-high. Then she was rolled gently off upon the grass. For a moment she lay there, staring at him. Then she chuckled. There had been no hint of lingering in the proceedings.

"I'll drive you home, if you're ready to go," she offered.

And Windy Meadows, watching them, go, shook indulgent heads.

"Whom will Lee Carstens pick up next?" they asked of one another.

IT HAD never been Lee's way to be discovered in her tactics. Therefore the young men of the town believed that their own native generosity prompted them to take pick and shovel and spend the next evening with Wesley on his new lot. And the young women, plus various articles of food and drink, supposed they were merely rewarding the toilers when they gathered round a bonfire after darkness had discouraged further action.

But Wesley, sitting beside Lee on a felled tree-trunk, drinking steaming coffee from a tin cup, taxed her with both acts of trespassing. Nor did he sound particularly grateful. He disliked obligation, and preferred dignified seclusion.

"Don't be a nut!" gasped Lee. She had put too much mustard in her hot-dog sandwich. "You said you couldn't get help. Doing it alone, you'd not finish this summer. Anyway, they're not heroes. They think they like it. Get all the work out of them you can before they find out it isn't a lark but real labor. They're sure to quit if they suspect they're useful. Here—eat it." And she poked a charred marshmallow at him with her pointed stick. "Yes; you must. I want to do this fat one."

Consequently Wesley Ames found himself playing host to Windy Meadows' "smart set." The girls, trained by Lee, learned longshoreman chanteys, insisting that the young men dig in time to their singing, thereby setting a pace no labor organization would have permitted.

They grew accustomed to his silences, and by their teasing admitted Wesley to their fellowship. He came to feel himself a legitimized spectator. Once, June Mayberry crept to a seat beside him, keeping close within the protective silence of his presence. He knew something was amiss, suspected it had to do with Hal Taintor, and he understood from the quick pressure she gave his fingers when leaving that she had found comfort in his unspoken sympathy.

By the time these young people tired of digging as a sport and sought recreation elsewhere, his cellar was finished.

But Lee Carstens did not desert the field. She arrived one afternoon, a bundle under her arm, which turned out to be overalls, into which she swiftly inserted herself. She looked up at him astride a bit of scaffolding and demanded, her cheeks very pink and her eyes less bright,

"How do I get up there?"

"You don't," Wesley answered promptly. But finding that she had come with the serious intent to hammer nails into wood, he assigned her a safe-and-sane spot for the exercise.

"It's fun," she offered as her only explanation when Wesley's dark eyes questioned her. And she appeared promptly the next day.

Of course, Windy Meadows talked. It invented a secret love-affair of long standing between Lee and Wesley. Her father, it was said, had opposed the match. Now that he saw the stuff the young man was made of, he had withdrawn his objections. The young people were building their future habitation. It was good to see them show such foresight. Wesley assuredly was more of a man than his father. Lee showed the Carstens shrewdness in selecting him rather than one of the town's gilded youths. Windy Meadows understood, smiled and shrugged.

And the girl, informed of their suspicions, also smiled and shrugged.

"Of course," she admitted, "some one will have to live in Wesley's house. Unless," she added, as an afterthought, "he is building for an investment. He might rent it, you know."

Meanwhile, the new house grew. Lee's nails came more and more frequently to lodge where nails would do the most good. And her comradely banter had quite dispelled the cloud of reticent shyness that for so long had enveloped Wesley Ames. He could talk to her without blushing about anything that concerned the house—not about anything else, of course.

"But I don't know why you do it," Wesley said helplessly, distressedly, while Lee danced about on one foot, the other being temporarily disabled by a dropped hammer.

Lee's hair was tousled, her nose smudged. But the dimples remained permanently on view these days, and she hooked her thumbs in the shoulder-straps of her overalls before answering.

"You're such a nut, Wes!" was all she found to say. "It's fun. Besides, you'd probably forget the linen-closet and the clothes-chute if I left you to yourself. I never could see why men were allowed to build houses. It's one of the things, like babies, that they can't possibly know."

And deep back in Wesley's black eyes burned the light that kindles when a girl smiles.

WITH the starting of work on the new house, the weight of misfortune, of gloom, of disappointments that had been Wesley's heritage seemed lifted. With Lee, youth and companionship had come into his life.

If workmen whom he might employ were unexpectedly idle of an afternoon, it seemed but a part of his new good fortune. Work on various houses was always being held up for some plausible reason. He grew to watch more and more eagerly for Lee's gray roadster to poke its nose up Tum Water Hill to his lot of the three pines.

"You've no idea what a worthy example you are in Windy Meadows, Wes," said the girl one warm Saturday afternoon. She was poised neatly upon a ladder, and was nailing shingles with skill and despatch.

And Wesley looked at her and smiled. That she found it response enough was proved by the deepening of the dimples and the extra rat-tat of her hammer.

"All the town fathers are rushing to dad—did he tell you?—offering to furnish the wherewithal to set their sons a-building. Our whole bunch is breaking up into twos, and each two is talking nothing but house. Matrimony's having quite a boost. Only, you've reversed the order. Now it's build first, then catch your bride."

"I'm glad," said Wesley Ames.

Lee's rat-tat took on an added fervor.

"Why?" asked she.

"That they are building first," explained Wesley. Then he flushed a deep scarlet. The remark sounded like a criticism of his father.

"Oh!" Lee stopped pounding while she considered. "Do you think it's safe?"

"Safe?" Wesley could never follow her. It did not greatly distress him. It was enough for him to have her here, perched on the step-ladder, chattering to him.

"To wait to catch your bride till—afterward? What if you found yourself with just a house on your hands?" And she looked at him as Lee Carstens seldom looked at anybody. She didn't have to.

But Wesley was mixing paint and did not see.

"You're sure you want it gray?" he stopped to ask anxiously. "I'd an idea it ought to be white."

And Lee descended precipitately from her step-ladder to argue the question. She could talk better, she explained, with her feet on solid ground.

"It's going to be the very prettiest house in town," she sighed contentedly. "I always did adore Dutch Colonial. Gray, with a trellis of Cecil Bruner roses before the door; a brick terrace—oh, Wes, I do think you've splendid taste!" said she who had dictated the placing of every stick and stone.

And finally the house was completed. The floors were waxed, the windows curtained. Even the trellis over the door was ready for next spring's roses. If Wesley had dawdled over these final jobs, Lee had not tried to hurry him.

"There's not one more thing to do to it but furnish it," she pronounced finally. She was sitting on an impromptu seat Wesley had fixed for her beneath the three pines. "That is, unless you intend to rent it unfurnished—" Then she waited.

"No; I'm not going to rent it," said Wesley.

"Oh!" The girl sat very still, silently, gravely looking at him.

"Well," she added finally, "I must be going."

Nonchalantly she stepped out of her overalls and into her skirt. If her daily negligence in the matter of seeking privacy for this exchange rather took Wesley's breath, he immediately admitted to himself that the bloomered figure temporarily revealed was adequately if unconventionally clothed.

"Good-by!" she flung at him over her shoulder and jumped into the gray roadster. For the first time since Lee Carstens had declared herself in on Wesley's house-building, she left him to walk home.

THE new house was finished, and Lee had said good-by to him. The task he had had set for himself at the age of eight was accomplished. How could he have guessed that there would be no joy in that fulfilment? His mother could move in whenever she liked. He hoped she would be content now. But, for himself, of course the fun was over. After all, he had not expected any fun in the building. That had been a free gift, unsolicited and undeserved, at the hands of Lee Carstens. Why should he complain that it was over? Better be humbly grateful that he had had it.

For a last time, perhaps, he opened the rickety gate, walked up the grass-grown path, stopped for a moment on the old entrance-stone and threw open the door.

"Your house is finished, mother," he said as he entered. "When do you want to move?"

Laura Ames slid quietly into the straight-backed chair that she was pushing toward the supper-table. And, silent as the boy himself, she stared at her son.

"Even the shades are up," he added at last, to break that uncomfortable stillness. "You can move to-morrow if you like."

And then Calvin Ames entered, and his wife looked at him almost in appeal.

"Supper ready?" he demanded gruffly. Then he added, glancing from beneath black brows first at one then at the other, "Well, what's up?"

"He says the house is finished," she almost whispered. "He says we're to move in whenever we like."

Wesley, almost with relief, met his father's fierce gaze. It was easier to explain to a man.

"You know I always meant," he said, as if they had often talked the matter over together, "to build her a new house. Now it's finished. That's all. I told her."

A slow, mottled flush crept up the man's neck and face.

"It seems," he said dryly to his wife, "you've got your new house at last. You aren't finding fault with that, I hope. When are we going to have supper?"

"My new house!" Laura Ames repeated the phrase, the tips of her fingers against her trembling lips. "My new house!"

"And supper," the man added.

She rose at that and went toward the kitchen.

It was a silent meal—Laura Ames sitting erect in her chair, eating not at all, returning to fulfil the wants of her two men folk as from a great distance.

"We'll need furniture," she said at last. There was a hint of color in her cheeks, a lifting of sagging face-muscles. Wesley found himself trying to remember if his mother had not once had the suggestion of a dimple in her right cheek.

"I haven't any more money," Wesley informed his father.

"I can manage the furniture," said Calvin Ames.

And Laura Ames seemed not to have heard that interchange by which her masculine providers adjusted between themselves the financing of her needs.

"And I'll need some new clothes," she added.

After the meal was over and the woman had returned to the kitchen, Calvin Ames turned enigmatic black eyes upon his son.

"The whole town's been saying," he informed him, "that you were building that house for yourself and Lee Carstens."

"It's mother's house," the boy managed to reply.

But the words set his ears ringing, echoing and reechoing through the chambers of his mind until his head seemed bursting with their reverberation. The town thought he was building a house for Lee! Then Windy Meadows believed Lee Carstens would marry him. To have her with him always—not for an occasional afternoon or for the few hours of a summer evening—he knew now what other men lived for. He himself had lived fifteen of his twenty-three years to build a house for his mother. But suppose that house had been for Lee; suppose she had consented to let him come and live in it with her, not for a day but for all the rest of his life. She wouldn't, of course. Windy Meadows was blind and deaf, and stupid if not dumb. But suppose—and suppose—and suppose——

WESLEY AMES' feet took him out into the late twilight of the cool autumn evening, took him across the level stretches of the old town, across the bridge that spanned the gulch separating Windy Meadows as it had been from Tum Water Hill and Windy Meadows as it was going to be. Stumblingly, for darkness had closed down upon him, he found his way to the rough bench under his own three pines. All outdoors was not big enough for the emotions that were beating within him, throbbingly demanding outlet.

"What in the world are you doing *here*, Wes?" Lee Carstens' voice demanded indignantly out of the darkness.

"Why—I—I wanted—" he stammered, too surprised at her presence to try to explain it to himself.

"To be alone. Well, so do I." She finished his sentence for him, and added one of her own for good measure.

It wasn't wisdom that made Wesley sink to the bench beside her. He understood quite miserably that she wanted him to leave her. It was just that her presence was the match to the gunpowder within him. Having come in contact with the flame, it could not but explode.

"I've just found out about love," he said, "It's awful, isn't it?"

"*Yes*, it is!" agreed Lee explosively, yet with a catch in her throat.

"I was happy all summer," he added plaintively, "before I knew I was in love with you. Now"—he stared blankly ahead of him—"I don't see how folks stand it."

"They don't." Lee's voice came to him with something of its old merry assurance. "They—get married—instead."

It wasn't true, of course. Lee was teasing him. She couldn't be hinting. And even as he reasoned thus, his arms were groping for her.

Yet, with Lee Carstens, Windy Meadows' most precious possession, undoubtedly yielding to the impulse of his hands, Wesley Ames paused.

"I haven't any house for you," he said, dull anguish tightening its grip upon him.

"Why—this—" Lee's puzzlement was apparent. Again he must somehow explain.

"This one," he said for the second time that evening, "is mother's. I promised myself to build it for her when I was eight years old."

"Oh!" said Lee, and was silent. But she did not withdraw from beneath his hands. From that fact, Wesley drew a measure of comfort. Whatever the degree of his future suffering, for the moment there was relief.

"Is that why you wouldn't go to college?" asked the girl gently.

"Yes," Wesley admitted.

"And why you wouldn't take time to play with the rest of us?"

"Yes," he said again. Never, he told himself wonderingly, had he heard that note of tenderness in Lee's voice. "My money's all gone, you know," he added, a need to do something for her strong upon him, "or I'd build you another house."

"Wes"—and Lee Carstens' head settled itself deliberately against his shoulder—"I just love that little old house of yours. We'll begin there."

Something within Wesley Ames melted—something sore due to his mother's long scorn of the house he had always loved. And the arms that enclosed Lee were muscled with gratitude as well as with longing.

"I can put in electric lights," he offered.

"Oh, you needn't," the girl said carelessly. "Lamps are ducky."

They sat there beneath the three pines in dreaming silence.

"Father'll give me that lot at the top of the hill," Lee finally spoke. "The one with the poplars."

"Yes?" said Wesley absently, deep in his dreams of Lee Carstens.

"Next time, I think I'd like to try English Tudor," she added presently. "Dutch Colonial is getting too common."

"All right," agreed Wesley, lips against her smooth cheek. And his eyes were seeing an old, vine-covered log cabin, a grass-grown brick walk leading up to it, with a great flat stone in place of a door-step, and standing there, waiting for him as he eagerly swung back the rickety gate, this girl, Lee, his wife.

Little Journeys Back Home

"Gee! Let's Go!"

The First of a Series of Boy-Stories for Boys and Girls of Anywhere from Twenty to a Hundred. Come and Be a Kid—a Regular One—Once More

By Henry Francis Granger

Illustration by Frederic Stanley

BOBBY KING shivered as his feet touched the cold floor—a shiver half cold, half excitement. He tiptoed to the dormer-window and looked out over the back yard. The sky was studded with stars, gleaming low, flashing and sparkling. He had never seen the stars so low, and they seemed to flash as though jerking at the end of short strings.

"Gee!" he said, shivering again as he sucked in a mouthful of sharp air through the space where a front tooth was missing.

The familiar yard lay etched clear in the starlight. He noticed the withered stalks in his mother's flower-bed, the two ash-barrels upon their boxes, with the drip-pails underneath, where the lye was seeping through that went into the soft soap every fall, and the soap-kettle itself upside down on the matted grass like the discarded helmet of some great giant. He saw the wood-pile and noticed the ax standing stiff, the blade stuck in the end of a heavy chunk, and he remembered, with a thrill of satisfaction, that he would not have to split any wood this morning.

This was his day, and, at the thought, he breathed, "Gee!" again softly. And then his gaze traveled to the end of the yard, and he noticed that the roof of the hen-house was white with frost, and the pile of slatted coops reared against the side of the barn looked almost like a mound of snow.

"It's goin' to be a bully day," he said aloud as he turned from the window, tingling in anticipation of the wonderful time ahead.

But the room seemed suddenly dark as he faced inward, and he upset with a crash the chair upon which his clothes were tossed. And, as he straightened it up, fumbling with unsteady hands for his trousers, his father's nightshirted form loomed in the doorway.

"Get back into bed there, young man!" He grinned sleepily. "It's only three o'clock."

"Gee, dad; it's just as light as day!" protested Bobby.

"It'll be dark enough a half-hour from now. Go to bed; I'll call you at six." He pulled the covers over the boy before he turned away.

"I can't sleep no more, dad."

Bobby heard the creak of his father's bed as he returned to it—and then he heard his father's voice and opened his eyes sleepily.

"Six o'clock, young Nimrod!" His father, fully dressed now, was grinning down upon him.

But Bobby was sleepier now than he had

been at three o'clock. He yawned, and then his eyes closed and he snuggled deeper under the covers.

"All right—if you rather sleep than go hunting."

But Bobby's thin legs were thrust from under the covers, and with a heave he was on the floor. Later, as he splashed the cold water over his head and face from the wash-basin in the kitchen sink, his father ladeled the batter from the brown bowl at the back of the stove to the sizzling griddle. The hired girl would not be down for a half-hour yet, and it was always his father who saw to it that Bobby had some breakfast before starting out on his regular Saturday excursion—fishing in the spring, hunting in the fall, or spearing fish through the ice or skating on the little river in winter. His father never accompanied him on these excursions, yet he was always as keenly interested in them as Bobby himself.

And as Bobby bolted his pancakes, swimming in maple-sirup, and drank a glass of milk, Mr. King made a couple of thick sandwiches and rolled them up in a newspaper with a piece of apple pie, a few cookies and a piece of cheese.

"Gee! I can't never eat all that," was Bobby's stock protest, but the paper of lunch went into the game-bag that Bobby swung over his shoulder, and the father understood that before noon Bobby would be searching that bag for the last elusive crumb.

"Now, be careful, son. Remember to take the cap off before you climb a fence, and never pull the gun toward you by the barrel."

"As if I didn't know all that!" said Bobby loftily.

He was carefully storing away his ammunition—the small bottle of black powder in the right-hand pocket, a bag of shot on the left side and the box of caps in his waistcoat. Half of an old newspaper was stuffed in with the bag of shot for wadding. Then Bobby dragged the cherished gun out of a corner and was ready to go.

It was a rebored musket, longer than Bobby, and with its iron ramrod weighed nearly ten pounds. But the boy managed it somehow, and he had never imagined that he would be willing to exchange it for any other. Even two years before, when he was only ten and not allowed to have powder, only a box of musket-caps, he had lugged that young cannon through the woods, snapping his caps, imagining every snap a score.

He recalled those days scornfully. He was only a kid then; now he was a real hunter.

HOW queer the town looked in the early morning! It always thrilled him with this sense of strangeness—the drawn shades at the windows, the shuttered store-fronts, the dimly burning street-lamps, but no sign of life, except perhaps the smoke from some early kitchen fire and the board walk snapping under his tread.

To the boy it became a deserted city at the edge of the wilderness, and he owned it all by the right of discovery. As he turned at the corner of Main Street, he saw the first inhabitant. It was Ed Naylor, the town drunkard, standing in front of McDowell's saloon, waiting for the bartender to open up. He often saw Ed Naylor waiting there in the early morning, his body drawn shiveringly together, his hands thrust deep in his ragged pockets.

"Hello, Ed!" he called patronizingly, as he shifted his gun to the other shoulder.

The shivering man hunched his shoulders and stamped his feet but made no reply. Ed was never sociable before the first drink. But Bobby swung on down the street; he didn't usually take the trouble to say "Hello!" to Ed Naylor.

Whistling shrilly, he turned in at the last house but one on Main Street. He went round to the back, and the kitchen door opened as he climbed the steps.

"Been waitin' for hours," said the boy in the doorway.

"Yes, you have!" said Bobby scornfully. "You ain't even washed your face yet."

"Theodore, come get your breakfast!" a voice called from inside.

Bobby sat in the kitchen while Theodore bolted a duplicate of the breakfast he himself had eaten. He sat with Theodore's gun across his knee, his own standing in a corner. He liked to handle Theodore's gun. It had a shiny red stock, and it was light and balanced, and used a regular shotgun-cap instead of the musket-cap he had to use.

And then Theodore had regular card-board wads. He didn't use newspaper, as Bobby did. His was a regular shotgun and had cost six dollars. Bobby liked to handle it, but he didn't have the confidence in it he had in his old musket. He knew he could ram a bigger charge of powder into the old musket than Theodore dare shoot in his gun, and Theodore was almost fourteen.

But Theodore had one thing that Bobby envied. He brought it out now—a real powder-horn. Theodore had got the cow's horn down at Trenchard's slaughter-house. He had cleaned it out inside, and then scraped it thin with glass and set a round disk of wood in the larger end and a wooden plug in the other, and it swung under his left arm from a strap that went over the opposite shoulder. Holding it to the light, the powder was visible through the thin horn.

"Guess that beats your old bottle!"

"Bottle's out of the way in my pocket. Ain't thumpin' against me like that old horn."

"Huh!" said Theodore, a world of scorn in his voice.

They crossed the bridge at the foot of Main Street, stopping to peer, as always, over the low railing into the shallow water beneath.

"Gosh, Bob! There's a big one!"

"I'll say it's a whale!" Bobby endorsed the ten-inch sucker that floated lazily below.

"No good now—full of worms." Theodore turned reluctantly away.

It was only a few rods from the bridge to the beginning of the hill road. They always went over Tobe's Hill to Belts' woods. It would not have seemed like going hunting to start off in any other direction. And before they began to climb the road that stretched across the face of the hill rising from the river, they always loaded their guns.

THE slope below and above the road was covered with bushes, and there was never any game there, although they ever expected that there might be. Bobby swung the butt of his gun to the ground, sliding it down the hill to enable him to reach the muzzle. He dragged the half-pound hammer to half-cock and blew down the barrel, to make sure that the nipple was clear, and then let the hammer down. Then, with the muzzle under his arm, he got out the powder-bottle and, drawing the cork with his teeth, poured the exact charge desired into the palm of his hand. Sticking back the cork and returning the bottle to his pocket, he poured the powder from his hand into the muzzle, crowding a generous wad of paper after it. He poked this down tight with the iron ramrod and then began to ram it home.

The secret of loading successfully was to set that paper hard upon the powder, and the boys flipped the ramrods down till they would jump clear from the ends of the barrels. Then the shot was measured out in their hands and rolled after the powder—only, now they pressed the paper lightly upon the shot. If you rammed down the shot, it made the gun kick, and they never did this unless they were loading for some other boy to fire. Then, with a glance at the nipple to be sure that the powder showed—if it didn't, they would prime it with an extra pinch—they would put on the caps and let the hammer gently down upon them. They were careful boys, and when the guns were loaded, there was no more skylarking.

So they followed up the Tobe's Hill road to the crest and across the wide plateau at the top. From the crest they looked back over the awakening town. Smoke was rising from the chimneys now, and men and teams were moving in the streets. The hoar frost had melted under the sun, and a thin haze hung over the valley.

As they watched, the seven-o'-clock whistle from Sawyer's mill blared loudly.

"Gee! It's great to be here!" Bobby could not have told why he felt that, but the feeling of absolute joyousness thrilled to the soul of him.

"Come on; this is the time for squirrels." Theodore was the one most obsessed with the desire to get somewhere else.

But, despite their hurry, they must stop to investigate the ruined cabin of Uncle Tobe. Legend had it that an old negro called "Uncle Tobe" had once lived here and had given the hill its name. There were only the log walls of a one-room cabin and a crumbling stone fireplace remaining now in a little clearing on the bank of a ravine. Gooseberry bushes grew wild about it, and earlier in the season these were loaded with wonderful purplish, spiny berries. The boys knew it was too late for berries, and they also knew every log and stone in the little ruin, but nevertheless they must stop and poke round—they always did.

And also, as they left, they stripped a few handfuls of the driest sweet-fern, growing thickly about, for they might want a smoke after luncheon, and then the pungent smell of the sweet-fern was part of the day's hunting. Indeed, it was so woven into the woof and warp of the scents and sensations that made up the fabric of these glorious days that it may have been the essential element of their completeness.

Ahead, where the road turned, lay the first patch of woods. This was second growth that had come up since the pine was cut, more than fifty years before, a mixture of beech, maple, hickory and chestnut, always a wonderful corner for red squirrels and some seasons sprinkled with the migratory blacks and grays.

AND this morning, as the boys approached the corner, a gray squirrel sprang from the roadside rail fence to the bushy top of a wild cherry and from thence to the lower limb of a chestnut, where it faced impudently about, chattering shrilly.

With every nerve tingling, Bobby rested the long barrel of the musket across the top rail and fired. There was a reverberating bang, a puff of black smoke, scraps of newspaper drifting down through the branches, and a gray squirrel clawing desperately to maintain its hold on the rough bark.

"I've got him! I've got him!" he shrilled, dropping the gun to scramble frantically over the fence just as the squirrel's grasp relaxed and it fell with a thud at the boy's feet. Bobby picked up the limp body and held it dangling, the bushy tail drooping over its back.

"See, Theo; a whale!"

"What you makin' so much fuss for—want to scare everything out of the woods?" Theodore had climbed the fence and was moving off through the trees. "Got to keep still if you're goin' to shoot squirrels!" he called back.

"I ain't *goin'* to; I did!" jeered Bobby. "Old jealous cat!" he supplemented gratuitiously.

And then he went back and spent double the time it would have taken him to climb the fence poking his gun with a stick to bring it within reach of his straining arm. Then the clatter of the ramrod sounded and the woods grew still again.

Bobby was seated upon a half-rotted log, smoothing the fur of his trophy, noting the filmy eyes with scraps of leaves and twigs sticking, the matted fur round the shot-punctures, the stiffening legs, and his satisfaction in this thing he had done faded.

"Gee!" he said, as he smoothed the rumpled fur regretfully.

And then a chipmunk chattered at the foot of a beech, and he stiffened, and the dead squirrel went into the game-bag and he pulled the gun across his knees. And then, all round, the red squirrels scolded and from the direction in which he had last seen Theodore came the "ch-r-r-r-r" of a black or gray. He twisted about cautiously, and then Theodore's gun sounded and a cry came through the woods:

"I've got mine!"

But Bobby sat motionless, again the relentless hunter waiting only a chance to kill. A red squirrel came down the trunk of a tree opposite. It tempted him, but it was early, and Bobby was after bigger game than red squirrels. It was ten minutes later when Theodore came rustling through the leaves.

"Say; you goin' to set here all day?"

"What'd you get?"

Theodore displayed a black squirrel.

"Ain't so big as my gray."

"Bet you it's heavier."

And then they took turns balancing them appraisingly, but reached no unanimous agreement.

"Let's go over'n the other patch—that's a better place than this," urged Theodore.

And so they started through the woods, and out of a narrow gully they were crossing a partridge rose almost at their feet. Both boys jumped at the whir of wings, but neither raised his gun. Somehow, they never could get their guns up for a wing-shot But they marked down where the ruffled grouse dipped, and crept forward, hoping to come upon it on the ground. But the bird flew again before they sighted it.

"No use tryin' to sneak up on those things. Got to have a dog," said Theodore in disgust.

They came to a patch of broad leaves, still green and untouched by the frost under the shelter of the bank, and they

"Say—" began Theodore, and the words died upon his lips. There was a sudden crash. The boys stood frozen in their tracks. "Gee!" cried Bobby, but it sounded like a squeal.

poked round and found two half-rotted mandrakes and ate them with great relish, and then they stripped a thorn-apple bush, each filling a pocket with the tiny red apples.

"Say; this ain't huntin'." Theodore had filled his pocket first and was climbing out of the gully. "Let's get over to the other corner."

They crossed a narrow pasture to the other patch of woods. There was less underbrush here, and they found logs and sat down within sight of each other to wait, motionless save as each worked away at the thorn-apples cached in his pocket.

And then Theodore shot another squirrel—a gray one, this time. One ahead on the score, the day brightened for Theodore.

"Ain't it great?" he called to Bobby in breathless satisfaction.

And Bobby agreed that it was. And so they sat there, watching the painted leaves spiral down, dropping singly, now in scattered groups and at some touch of a stronger blast of upper air, unfelt by the boys below, swirling down like flurries of driven snow.

And ever the sharp clamor of the busy red squirrels, punctuated by the occasional heavier "ch-r-r-r-r" of a gray or black, the twitter of snowbirds, just coming back to their winter grounds, the call of lingering blue jays, the wafted clamor of flocking crows, and over all the soft fragrance of the warm autumn morning and two boys in the peace of holiday freedom, untouched by care or worry.

BUT soon they grew tired of waiting. Ever the thrilling "ch-r-r-r-r" came from just beyond their field of vision and they began to stalk their prey, but somehow they never could glimpse the squirrel in the tree where they had located his last call, and they grew impatient, moving about noisily, most incessantly talking and calling back and forth, and ever the new "ch-r-r-r-r" sounded beyond or back where they had recently passed.

"Let's go over to Brush's woods; they're gettin' wild here."

"Always get wild about this time," agreed Bobby. "Guess it's the sun."

And so they climbed the fence to a pasture lot that stretched wide to a denser, more extensive growth known as "Brush's woods." And as they jumped to the ground on the pasture side, a rabbit darted out of the weeds and briers that lined the straggling fence and bounded away across the close-cropped field.

Bobby's charge tore into the ground far to the rear and Theodore's shot furrowed the dry grass fully ten feet ahead of the flying bunny, but it served to turn him. Apparently headed for the shelter of Brush's woods, it swerved sharply and took refuge in a stone pile in the middle of the pasture, and remarkably close behind, the boys came to a panting stop at the edge of the pile.

"We can get him out of here. Load up." Theodore took charge. With trembling hands, spilling considerable powder and shot, they reloaded their guns, laying them carefully upon the ground. For a time they tore away the stones, working in where the rabbit had disappeared, but the pile was a big one, many of the stones heavy, and they grew weary while yet keenly interested.

"Say, Theo; he may run out the other side if we don't watch out."

"That's so! One of us better watch." Both boys stood gun in hand.

"Somebody's got to dig." Bobby voiced the self-evident fact.

"Go on—you!"

"Then he's half my rabbit if you shoot him."

" 'Course. Don't we always divvy?"

So Bobby tore at the stone pile and Theodore stood watch, and then Bobby stood gun in hand while the other worked.

"Gee! You can't tell where he's gone—this old pile's full of holes." Bobby was wiping his sweaty face.

It was Theodore's turn to dig again, but he was losing interest, and he began to poke a mullein stalk in the interstices ahead of their excavation. Luck favored him; the mullein stalk reached the rabbit and it squealed—the pitiable, ineffectual squeal of a cornered, frightened rabbit. The bunny had blundered into a cul-de-sac, and his enemies were upon him.

"Careful, now—we can catch him. Catch 'em awful easy in a stone pile sometimes." With the mullein stalk pressed against the cornered rabbit, both boys were tearing away the intervening stones. Then Theodore lifted the edge of one wedging sidewise, and Bobby thrust in his arm and grabbed their prey.

The bunny struggled wildly, squealing in terror, but the boy relentlessly dragged him out. But the bunny was an old one and heavy, and as Bobby swung it up to dash it against the stones, his grip on the jerking leg slipped, the rabbit dropped to the ground and darted away.

With yells of chagrin and disappointment, both boys tore after him, and then realizing the folly of this, they plunged back for their guns, but when they had grabbed them up, the rabbit had disappeared.

"You let him get away!"

"Gee! I didn't do it a-purpose, did I?" Bobby was almost in tears, but he fought them back. Nothing quite so cataclysmic as this had ever happened to either of them.

"Ain't no fun huntin', anyhow. Nothin' but hard work 'at makes your head ache." Theodore was deep in the dumps, his world suddenly become a dark and sour place.

Bobby said nothing. He couldn't trust himself to speak just then, but he knew he was tired and hot and hungry. The knowledge that he was hungry came with such a shock of surprise that, for a moment, he forgot his grief at the loss of the rabbit.

"Let's eat our lunch, Theo," he suggested, almost with animation.

"Suppose we might's well; then we'll go home." But they were walking in the direction of the woods where the rabbit had disappeared.

"Might's well go on down to the spring; it's awful hot." They found the spring and, lying upon their stomachs, drank deep.

"Don't see why we're such darn fools to waste Sat'day this way." Theodore was moodily tearing into his paper of lunch.

"Ain't no fun," Bobby agreed, his thoughts upon the lost rabbit.

For a time they ate in silence, each engrossed in his own thoughts, and then they began to examine fugitively the contents of each other's package.

"Trade pie?" suggested Bobby.

With mutual satisfaction they exchanged almost identical pieces of apple pie, and then Bobby ate the last of Theodore's cookies and Theodore ate Bobby's sole survivor. Satisfied at last that no crumb had escaped, each tore a small square of newspaper and painstakingly rolled a sweet-fern cigarette. They were bulging, shapeless and very wet contrivances when finished, and the fern leaves were withered but not dry, and after considerable ineffectual effort to keep the edges of the paper together and lighted, they gave up the attempt to smoke and lay peacefully back, watching the sunlight through the naked tree-tops, breathing back content.

"Gee! That was the biggest rabbit I ever saw," mused Bobby.

"Bet he weighed twenty pounds," said Theodore, and again his voice was cheerful.

"Suppose we can find another?"

"Bet we can!" Theodore sat up suddenly. "'Member that stump lot down by Tucker's, where all the brush piles is? They's rabbits there."

"I'll bet you!" cried Bobby gleefully.

THEN, after another long drink from the spring, they started on. But they traveled slower now, shifting their guns from shoulder to shoulder. The woods seemed strangely empty. If there were squirrels about, they were silent now, at midday, and not even a jay scolded. And the boys too grew silent, trudging along in heavy-footed indifference. The spring of anticipation had left them, but the weariness that would prompt their turning had not yet come upon them. They were no longer keenly interested, but they kept going because they were headed this way and it had not occured to them to turn.

And so they crossed Brush's woods and came to an orchard, and only a narrow strip of woods on the other side of the orchard intervened between it and the stump lot that was their immediate destination. But their spirits revived at sight of the orchard. Scattered apples still clung to the leafless branches, and maybe some of them would be good to eat. And some of them were; at least they ate them and filled a pocket or two.

They came out of the orchard with renewed interest and spread out and seriously hunted through the next patch of woods, flushing another partridge that escaped a shot, but the thrill of its whirring flight refired their ardor, and they climbed eagerly over the last fence into the stump lot.

This lot had been timbered off years before and grown up to brush. Two or three seasons before, the brush had been cut and piled round the stumps, but the

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owner had never gotten round to burn it, and before now the boys had found rabbits here, and once Theodore had shot one.

"I shot a whale of a rabbit here once." he said. "Bigger than th' one we had."

"Ain't any bigger rabbit than that," disputed Bobby.

"Jes' you wait!" Theodore was stamping the edge of the nearest brush pile. A gray streak bounded out from the opposite side and zigzagged across the clearing. Both boys fired, but the rabbit kept on with accelerated speed.

Theodore was reloading with frantic haste.

"Bet there's one under every pile!"

"Bet they is!" agreed Bobby, in his excitement dropping the ramrod, and, when he stooped to recover it, dipping the gun until the shot rolled out of the barrel to disappear in the leaves. Reloaded at last, they began to stamp the brush piles systematically, but no more rabbits bounded away from the crackling sticks.

It was warm work, and when they were finished their knees were shaky, and they went over to lie at the edge of the woods and plan the next move. They stretched on the ground as their sweating bodies cooled.

"Gee! It's gettin' cold. Bet you it freezes tight to-night."

"Bet you it's a fierce winter. The hickory shells is awful thick," supplemented Theodore.

From a far end of the woods rose the clamor of flocking crows.

"Let's go shoot a crow," suggested Bobby.

"What you want to walk all over the world for?" protested Theodore, but he was first on his feet.

"Used to have a hired man who could call all those old crows right into the tree where he was. Said he bet he shot a million."

"Huh! Ain't easy to shoot a crow." Bobby was skeptical.

They were stealing quietly through the woods now, and the sound of the cawing was growing nearer. The boys moved more cautiously, stealing from tree to tree, each in his heart stalking big game and each imagining he was flitting shadowlike, silent as an Indian. Two years before they would have proclaimed this boldly, but now they only thought it, each hiding the thought even as he cherished it. They were men now, and neither would have confessed indulgence in kid-dreams under torture. The unspeakably terrible thing was ridicule.

They were drawing very close, the clamor just ahead, when a rautious caw sounded above them, and there was a chorus of startled caws, the beat of wings, and silence fell about them.

"Gee! They always beat it."

"Didn't I say what you want to walk all over the world for?"

"Might as well be walkin'; anyway, it's gettin' warmer." said Bobby.

Again they threw themselves upon the ground and rested.

"If we start back about four o'clock, the squirrels will be out," said Theodore hopefully.

"Gee! That's the best time to get squirrels—better'n the mornin'," agreed Bobby.

"See that patch of evergreens?" Theodore pointed across the stump lot to a dense growth of scrub-pine. "Sometimes they's owls in there."

"Let's go!" cried Bobby. "Gee! I'd like to get a owl to stuff."

THEY passed from the stump lot into the edge of the pine grove without the formality of climbing the fence. Tucker's fences were sketchy affairs of brush, poles and good intentions. They evidently defined bounds satisfactorily enough for him, but to the outside world they were no more visible, in spots, than is the line of the equator. The boys simply walked through where the fence was supposed to be and found themselves almost at once in the cathedral-like gloom of the pines.

The ground thickly strewn with pine-needles muffled their footsteps, and the dim silence of the place fell upon them, and they found themselves speaking softly and tiptoeing where they might have run carelessly and made no sound.

"Gee! This is a spooky place." And then Bobby regretted that he had said it. Somehow, it didn't seem right to talk of spooks in there. Spooks should be treated with respect and not be mentioned carelessly. And then, with some faint idea of conciliation that took the form of an apologetic attempt to cover the malapropos remark by a change of subject, he repeated an old story.

"Once, when my mother was a little girl, a bear came down out of these woods right onto the Main Street bridge." But as he said it, Bobby felt that he had not improved matters.

"Huh!" scoffed Theodore. "Ain't no bears now."

If there were any ring of conviction in Theodore's voice, it failed to impress Bobby.

"Maybe," he said vaguely.

"Maybe what?"

"Maybe folks don't see everythin' they is," whispered Bobby.

"Shucks!" said Theodore scornfully, striding boldly ahead. "This would be a bully place for foxes."

"Why?" Bobby found something reassuring now in the sound of Theodore's voice.

"Well, it's almost like a cave, ain't it? Bet you it wouldn't rain through here in a week."

They were well into the center of the grove now, and here was a sprinkling of hemlocks in small clusters, their branches growing so low that the boys must detour to pass, and this disturbed Bobby, for he had been keeping the line of retreat back to the stump lot clearly fixed in his mind, and this winding-about troubled him, although not for worlds would he have admitted it.

"Them's bully Christmas trees," remarked Theodore. There was something about the hemlock that seemed to have broken the spell of the pines. They were vastly more friendly trees, and unconsciously the boys reacted in confidence that expressed itself in more cheerfully pitched voices.

"Couldn't never lug one of 'em clear home from here." said Bobby regretfully, but his eyes sparkled at the Christmas vision the trees evoked. And this new confidence remained when they had passed the Christmas trees and were again in the gloom of the pines beyond.

"It ain't far from here to the other side," said Theodore. "But it's an awful tough place. Sort o' slashin' or somethin', and trees and logs and bushes all jumbled in a gully back of Tucker's house."

"Wouldn't think there's a house in miles and miles of here."

"Well, it ain't very close," admitted Theodore.

They were nearing the extreme edge of the pine grove, and ahead could be seen the tangle of tag-alder, sumac and dogwood, thrusting above a mat of briers that lined the edge of a gully.

"Might's well go back." suggested Theodore.

"Gee! I didn't see no owl."

"Say—" began Theodore, and the words died upon his lips. There was a sudden crash, a growling snort, the sound of a heavy body plunging through the bushes. The boys stood frozen in their tracks.

"Gee!" cried Bobby, but it sounded like a squeal.

THEODORE took a few uncertain steps forward, but there was another grunt and a crash in the bushes, and he recoiled in panic. He didn't run. At the most, he had but stumbled backward, but that momentary shrinking-back of the older boy was too much for Bobby.

With a stifled cry he turned to run, but his foot slipped on the greasy pine-needles, and he plunged forward on his face, and the musket, flying out of his hand, crashed against the trunk of a tree and discharged with a deafening roar.

Thoroughly demoralized now, he scrambled forward, frantically grabbing up the gun by the end of the barrel, and bounded away, the stock bumping and clattering beside him as he ran, straight as a honey-laden bee, for the haven of the stump lot.

"What you runnin' for?" panted Theodore, close behind.

Bobby jerked his gun forward, catching the barrel at a point that would lift the stock from the ground, and then, less encumbered, ran faster, but he wasted no breath in explanation.

Gradually the pace slackened; the spirit was willing, but human endurance has its limits, and they slowed down to a panting, staggering walk. Neither spoke again until they glimpsed the stump lot through the trees.

"What d'you suppose that was?"

"Maybe deer." Theodore tried to make his voice sound casual.

"Or a bear!" gasped Bobby, starting nervously forward at his own suggestion.

"Mighty funny," said Theodore, calm now under the comforting light of the sun on the stump lot.

At the edge of the clearing, Bobby was reloading his gun with hands still unsteady.

"Some day, when we've got more time, we'll come back there."

"Some mornin' when we've got lots of time," agreed Theodore. "But we're after squirrels to-day, and there ain't no squirrels in there."

And then they turned back and hunted through Brush's woods, but failed to sight any game. And at about the time they started, Tucker's half-wild red calf scrambled out of the gully, galloped stiff-legged across a clearing and, with tail up, trotted across the pasture and through the broken fence back into the barn-yard.

The early twilight found the boys back in the corner of Belts's woods where they had started. Here each fired and missed, and failed to glimpse again the squirrel at which he had shot. The dusk of early evening settled down upon the woods, and suddenly the boys were very tired and the long way home loomed an endless journey ahead of them.

"Ain't no use loadin' again."

"All right." said Bobby, astride of the rail fence. He wished he might sit there and never move again. His legs ached, and his shoulders were sore where the barrel of the heavy musket had chafed and rubbed them.

"Gee!" he moaned, as they dragged their stumbling feet homeward. "This old gun weighs a ton."

" 'S the last time you'll ever get me up here," grumbled Theodore.

"Who got you?"

"You did! Didn't I tell you last time I wouldn't go again? You know it always makes my head ache, and yet you keep teasin'."

"Ain't goin' huntin' no more my own self—goin' to build a rabbit-hutch next Sat'day." declared Bobby.

From the crest of the hill they looked down upon the twinkling lights of the town.

"Gee! I wish I was home and had a piece of mince pie."

"Don't want no pie; I got a sick-headache," groaned Theodore miserably.

But they made to the beginning of the sidewalk at last.

"Bet we've walked fifty miles since we left here," said Bobby, as one stating a deplorable fact.

But Theodore only groaned as he staggered blindly on. At his gate he turned into the yard without a word of good-by.

For a minute or two Bobby sagged against the fence, too weary and dispirited to start upon the next long stretch to his own home.

"Gee! I betch y' I never go again." Perhaps it was the decision that heartened him to the start, but some fifteen minutes later he had turned in at his own gate, dragging the trailing gun-stock by the barrel over the last desperate stretch to the front door.

MONDAY morning, Theodore stopped for Bobby on his way to school.

"I had a fierce headache all day yesterday," he said, still gloomy.

"My shoulders is black and blue and all skinned, and dad threw away my squirrel. It smelled fierce."

"I'll bet you we never go huntin' no more," said Theodore.

"I'll bet you we don't, neither," agreed Bobby.

Tuesday and Wednesday they were of the same mind. Thursday, Theodore called earlier than usual for Bobby.

"What you goin' to do Sat'day, Bob?"

"Don't know," said Bobby. "Guess maybe I'll build a rabbit-hutch."

"Huh! Ain't no fun buildin' a rabbit-hutch, 'cept in the barn when it rains."

"I dunno," said Bobby.

Friday, Bobby was waiting at the gate for Theodore. But when Theodore came and they started on toward school, each seemed under the restraint of some strange embarassment. Fully a third of the way they walked in silence.

"Black frost last night," ventured Theodore.

"Bet it's cleaned off all the leaves," said Bobby.

Again they walked in silence.

"Squirrels' just hustlin' to get in the last nuts," remarked Theodore.

"Bet there won't be much more huntin' before snow comes," mused Bobby.

"Let's go to-morrow," said Theodore.

"Gee! Let's go!" cried Bobby joyously.

The next story of the "Little Journeys Back Home" series, "When Fear Was Forgotten," will appear in October EVERYBODY'S—out September 15th

Rope

A Novel
Complete
in This Issue

Did You Ever Try to Sit upon a Youngster and Find It Like Trying to Sit a Bucking Bronco? Two Irrepressible Youths—Male and Female—and a Company of Doubting-Thomas Relatives—a Story Is Inevitable

By Holworthy Hall

Illustrations by Ralph Dunkelberger

AS HENRY came blithely into the house with a suitcase in one hand and a kit-bag in the other, his Aunt Mirabelle marched out from the living-room and posted herself in the hallway to watch him approach. There was this much to say for Aunt Mirabelle: she was at least consistent, and for twenty years she had changed neither the style of her garments nor the nature of her convictions. She had disapproved of Henry when he was six, and therefore she disapproved of him to-day, and to let him know it, she regarded him precisely as though he were still six.

"I suppose," remarked Aunt Mirabelle, "you're waiting for me to say I hope you had a good time. Well, I'm not a-going to say it, because it wouldn't be true, and I wouldn't want to have it sitting on my conscience. Of course, *some* people haven't got any conscience for anything to sit on, anyway. If they did, then once in a while they'd think about something else besides loud ties and silk socks and golf, and gallivanting off on house-parties. They'd be tending to their business—if they had any. And if they hadn't, they ought to."

Henry put down the bag and the suitcase, removed his straw hat and grinned with a fair imitation of cheerfulness.

"Maybe so," he said; "maybe so—but, just for the sake of the information, I *did* have a pretty good time, anyway."

"Humph," said Aung Mirabelle. "That's right, Henry; be pert! But *I* know what made you so anxious to get off on this week-end; and I know whose account you went on, too. I did hope you'd grow up different from other boys, Henry; but you're all just alike. When you get old enough, do you pick out some pure, innocent, sensible young woman that's been trained the way girls were trained in *my* day? No. You go and make fools of yourselves over these short-skirted little hussies all powdered up like a box of marshmallows."

In spite of himself, Henry lost his artificial grin.

"I wouldn't go quite so far as to say *that*."

"Well," retorted Aunt Mirabelle, "I didn't hardly expect you *would*. But you'll go far enough to *see* one of 'em, I notice. Well, your uncle's home this afternoon; you *might* have the grace to go in and say howdy-you-do to him." She walked away, and Henry, revolving his hat in his hand, was struck for the ten-thousandth time by the amazing mystery of the human family.

First, there was his mother, a small and exquisite woman with music in her heart and in the tips of her fingers. His memory of her was dim, but he knew that she had been a creature of joy and sunshine and the sheer happiness of existence. Next, her sister Mirabelle, who found life such a serious condition to be in and loved nothing about it save the task of reforming it for other people. Finally, her brother John, bald, fat and good-natured—a man whose personal interests were bounded by his own comfort and by his desire to see every one else equally comfortable. Whenever Henry thought of this trio, he reflected that his grandparents must have been very versatile.

He drew a long breath, then turned and walked slowly into the library.

His uncle, John Starkweather, sprang up to shake hands with him.

"Hello, boy! Thought Bob Standish must have kidnaped you. Have a good party?"

"Fine, thanks," said Henry, but his tone was uncommonly subdued and joyless.

His uncle stared at him for a moment, smiled a trifle ruefully.

"What's the matter? Mirabelle say anything to you?"

"Why—nothing special."

His uncle hesitated.

"In a good many ways," he said, lowering his voice, "Mirabelle puts me in mind of my father. When he was a boy, out in the country, he'd had to smash the ice in the water-pitcher every mornin', and he was proud of it—thought a boy that hadn't earned some of his godliness with an ice-pick was a dude. Well, Mirabelle's cut more or less off the same piece. She's been talkin' to me about you ever since you went off on this party—and I'm not on *her* side and I'm not on *your* side—but, just as man to man, Henry, suppose you *did* pass up everything I've said to you and went and got married one of these fine days—did you expect I'd go on supportin' you?"

Henry came down to earth.

"Why—what was that?"

His uncle repeated it, with a postscript:

"Oh, I've always told you you could have anything you wanted within reason that I could pay for. But from what I hear"—his eyes twinkled—"wives ain't always reasonable. And it does seem to me that when a young man gets to be twenty-five or -six, and never did a lick of work in his life, just because he's got a rich uncle, why, it's sort of a reflection on both of 'em. Seem so to you?"

Henry looked at him nervously.

"To tell the truth, I hadn't thought much about it."

"Say," said his uncle confidentially; "neither had I. Not till Mirabelle told me you went off on this party because Anna Barklay was goin' to be there. Now, I had pretty hard sleddin' when I was your age; I've kind of liked to see you enjoy yourself. But you been out of college four years now, and you tried the automobile business for two months and the bond business for two weeks and the real-estate business for two minutes, and there you quit. You spent five, six thousand a year, and *that* was all right; but I admit I don't like the idea of your plannin' to get married on nothin' but prospects, specially when I'm all the prospects there is. Sound fair to you?"

Henry nodded with much repression.

"You're *always* fair, Uncle John."

"Well, *you've* always been open to reason, and before you get involved too deep, I want you to know what's in my mind. I don't believe you're exactly *afraid* of work; but you never been properly introduced to it, so you're kind of shy about it. But if you go get married, boy, before you show you could take care of yourself and what money I might leave you, why, then you and me'd have to have a quarrel. Sound logical to you?"

"Too darned logical," Henry said, under his breath.

His uncle sat down and surveyed him with great indulgence.

"What's the idea?" he asked humorously. "You ain't gone off and got yourself married already, have you?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

THE older man sat limp in his chair and stared.

"Boy," he said at length; "boy—is that true?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

"Who is it? Anna Barklay?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

"When?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Does—Judge Barklay know it yet?"

"No; not yet. He's out of town."

His uncle drew a tremendous breath and pulled himself upright.

"Boy," he said quietly, "why in the devil did you ever go and do a thing like that? Haven't I been pretty decent to you, the best I knew how? Why, boy, I thought you and me were *friends!*"

There was another heavy silence.

"I don't know. We've always been crazy about each other."

Mr. Starkweather was looking at and through his nephew. Henry had never hid behind an excuse, and he had paid his penalties as royally as he had earned them. Even now, he had nothing to say in his own defense. He had stated the facts, and he was ready for judgment.

Mr. Starkweather began to collect alibis. For one thing, Henry had chosen the right girl—a girl with no money and plenty of character. For another thing, Henry was profoundly in love with her, even though he tried to conceal his emotion by spreading it with a generous helping of light manner and vocabulary. These facts, together with Mr. Starkweather's control of finances, might possibly operate as the twin levers which would pry Henry out of his improvidence. He leaned his elbows on his desk, judicially.

"I'm pretty much knocked edgeways, Henry—and I was just goin' to tell you, before you sprung it on me, that if you cared two cents about that girl—to say *nothin'* of me—you'd want to deserve her. You'd want to do *some*thin' besides be a model to hang expensive clothes on."

"Yes," said Henry, also judicial; "I guess I'm entitled to *that* wallop, too."

His uncle nodded.

"That one and quite a few more. Well, who knows this—besides us?"

"Just Bob Standish. We took him along for a witness."

"So! Bob Standish! Hm. I'd have thought Bob'd had sense enough to try to stop it."

"He *did* try."

Mr. Starkweather rose.

"Where's Anna?"

"Out in the car. With Bob."

His uncle whirled on him.

"Out *there*? Waitin' there all this time? For heaven's sake, Henry, go bring her in here—and tell her to stop worryin'! I'm sore as the mischief, and I'm goin' to make an example out of you, but *that* ain't any reason to scare *her* to death, is it?"

She was small and intensely feminine, but there was nothing fragile about her, no slightest hint of helplessness. She was pretty enough, too, and her attractions were more than skin-deep; to the qualities which showed in her eyes—sincerity and humor and imagination—there was also to be added sweetness of disposition and sensitiveness, which were proved by the curves of her mouth, and, finally, there was native determination, which was evident in the molding of her strong little chin.

SHE came in slowly, questioningly, not in fear, but poised so as to adjust herself to any style of reception. Mr. Starkweather met her eyes and laughed. Blushing, she ran to him, with hands outstretched.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Starkweather, "I'll say Henry's got a darned sight better judgment 'n you have! Go on and blush. Make a good job of it. And then sit down there and cringe. You, too, Henry." He himself remained on his feet. "Well," he said, after a pause, "you young folks sort of went and took a chance, didn't you? So all that's left is to find out whether it was worth it or not." He surveyed them critically. "If you'd waited till Henry did what I wanted him to, I'd kind of made things easy for you. *Now* I'm goin' to hand him the meanest job I can think of."

Henry squared his shoulders.

"What is it, Uncle John?"

"Well, I'll tell you—just as soon as you get back from your honeymoon."

"From our—what?" asked the girl incredulously.

"Honeymoon." He gestured impatiently. "Oh, you made a couple of prize fools of yourselves, but—guess I better make a fool of *my*self, too, so you'll feel more at home." He coughed explosively. "Besides, you're awful young, both of you—and, darn it, if you don't cash in on it now—" He jerked his head toward Henry. "All right. This is April. Take her off somewhere—Italy—south of France—till next August. Then you report back here, all fixed and ready to eat crow. Sound fair to you?"

The girl rose and crossed the room to him.

"Mr. Starkweather——"

"Name's Uncle John," he corrected.

"Uncle John—I—I don't know how to—" She gestured imperatively to Henry. "*You* know him better—*you* tell him."

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Henry had sprung across to join them.

"Uncle John, you're a peach! I'll break rock on the streets if you say so. You're a peach!"

"Well," said Mr. Starkweather uncomfortably, "that's all right. Only, when you get back, I'm goin' to make Henry earn his salt, whether he can earn anythin' to put it on or not. And that goes as it stands, too; no foolin' but only, *how* in blazes am I goin' to get it across to Mirabelle? *That's* what bites me the worst, Henry; that's what bites me the worst!"

IN A small office on the third floor of the City Bank Building, Mr. Theodore Mix, broker and amateur politician, sat moodily intent upon his morning newspaper. For thirty years (he was fifty-five) Mr. Mix had managed by great effort to keep himself excessively overrated; a few years ago he had even been mentioned as a candidate for mayor, and the ambition was still alive within him, although fulfilment was never so distant. But despite his appearance, which was dignified, and despite his manner, which would have done for the diplomatic corps, and despite his connection with charities and churches and civic committees, Mr. Mix was secretly a bit of a bounder; and although for the past two decades he had made a handsome income, he had contrived to get rid of it as fast as he conveniently could, and by methods which wouldn't always have stood the analysis of a Methodist minister.

Lately, for no apparent cause, his best customers had edged away from him; he was gliding rapidly into debt, and he knew that unless he clambered out again within six or eight weeks, he should have considerable difficulty in preserving his reputation. And Mr. Mix was fiercely jealous of his prestige.

For the moment, however, Mr. Mix was querulous rather than defensive. He was trying to place the blame for the past two seasons of misfortune; and when he observed that Pacific Refining was up twelve points from Tuesday's close, he sighed wearily and told himself that it was all a matter of luck. He had planned, only last Monday, to borrow something from his friend John Starkweather, if possible, and to risk a few hundred shares of Pacific Refining on margin; but Mr. Starkweather hadn't come to his office on Monday at all, and hadn't come in since—so that the profit which might so easily have been at rest in Mr. Mix's pocket was now in other quarters.

As he turned to the sporting-page, however, his querulousness yielded to a broad, sunny optimism; he had a friend at the Bowie track, and the friend, who owned a horse which he swore was the darkest three-year-old in captivity, had wired Mr. Mix to hypothecate his shirt and bet the proceeds on the fourth race, Saturday.

Mr. Mix leaned back and built a stable in the air. Suppose he could borrow a couple of thousand. The odds, so his friend had assured him, would be at least six to one. That meant twelve thousand clear profit. Then a quick dash into the cotton market—the price was certainly going to break wide open in another month—and the twelve would unfold and expand. To be sure, Mr. Mix had been losing steadily for a dozen years, but he was confident that he had it in him to be a successful plunger.

His stenographer announced a caller, and on the instant Mr. Mix put on his other personality. The caller, however, came straight to Mr. Mix's desk and flipped out one sheet from a large portfolio.

"Say," he remarked bruskly; "what's the matter with this bill? Ziegler & Company. Ziegler says if you don't settle by the fifteenth he'll give it to his lawyer."

It was the second time in a week that an attorney had been lugged into the conversation; more than that, Mr. Mix had received four letters from two different collection agencies.

"In the words of the Good Book," he said amicably, "have patience—and I will pay thee all."

"What say? Will I come in next week sometime?"

"Now, that," said Mr. Mix, with a rush of approval, "is a first-rate idea. Come in next week sometime."

The visitor went out, and Mr. Mix scowled heavily. To think that after his lifetime as an important citizen—generally supposed to be well-to-do if not actually rich—he couldn't pay a trifling account of less than three hundred dollars because he didn't have three hundred in the bank!

And yet—and yet there was always John Starkweather and the friend at Bowie. Mr. Mix rose and went out to the corridor, and down it to a door which was lettered with Mr. Starkweather's name; and as he entered, and recalled that thirty years ago he and John Starkweather had sat at the same high desk and broken their backs over the same drudgery, and at the same wage, he was filled with a lively resentment. Mr. Mix was certain that he was brainier than John Starkweather. But Starkweather's office handled the bulk of local realty transactions; it wrote more insurance than all of its competitors in a mass; it loaned almost as much money on mortgage as the Trust and Savings. And Mr. Mix, broker, was on the verge of bankruptcy. Luck! No question about it.

At the swinging gate he learned that Mr. Starkweather was in to-day, but temporarily engaged. Would Mr. Mix wait? Mr. Mix alleged that he would do that very thing—and went sedately forward to the reception-room. The door of the private office was not quite closed; so that the voices of two men were clearly audible.

"Yes," said a voice, which at first he couldn't recognize; "the deed's already recorded. So, legally, Henry's the owner of the property now." Mr. Mix nodded triumphantly; the voice belonged to Mr. Archer, a leading lawyer and Mr. Starkweather's closest associate.

"That's the idea." This was in Mr. Starkweather's familiar bass. "Now, about this will— Naturally, I don't expect to be dead quite so quick as all that, but I want to be sure and fix it so Henry'll get the same deal, no matter what happens."

"Why, it's very simple. Your point was that you didn't want everybody to know what was going on. And, of course, as soon as a will is probated, it's no secret from the public. The best thing, then, is for you to set up what we call a testamentary trust. And I've changed the will so the entire residuary estate is left to me in trust for your sister and nephew, to be administered according to an agreement made beforehand. They can probate *that* will until they're black in the face, but nobody's going to find out any more than you want them to."

"Sounds all right so far."

"Now for the trust agreement itself—if Henry demonstrates to me that within a year——"

"A year from August first. Henry won't be home till then."

"Correct. If he demonstrates to me that within the calendar year he's made a net profit of ten thousand dollars from the property— By the way, isn't that rather steep?"

"No. Man's in there now's made three thousand and manhandled it."

"Very well. If Henry succeeds, then he's to receive from the trust the entire residuary estate; otherwise it goes to your sister. And during that trial year she's to receive the whole income from the fund. Is that right?"

"That's right, Archer."

"Well then, if you'll just get a couple of witnesses in here, we can clear the whole thing up and have it out of the way."

Mr. Mix heard the scrape of chair-legs against the floor, and hastily, on tiptoe, he crossed the room to the center-table and helped himself to a magazine which he was reading with much concentration when the door of the private office opened.

"Why, hello, Mix!" said Mr. Starkweather. "Been waitin' long?"

"Just got here," said Mr. Mix, startled. He returned the magazine to the table, and was still standing when his friend came back in convoy of young Mr. Robert Standish, his chief assistant.

"Come on in, Mix. Want you to witness a couple of papers."

With all due solemnity, Mr. Mix carried out the function which was assigned to him. While he was blotting his second signature, he was wondering how to capitalize what he had overheard.

"Stay right here, Mix. That's all, ain't it, Archer?"

"That's all." The lawyer was packing up his papers. 'Good-morning, gentlemen." He bowed himself away; Standish had long since vanished.

"WELL, what can I do for you, Mix?" Mr. Starkweather began, as soon as the door had closed on the lawyer. "How much do you want?"

Mr. Mix looked pained.

"Why, to tide me over the dull season, John, I need—let's see—about five thousand."

Mr. Starkweather drummed on his desk.

"Any security?"

Mr. Mix smiled blandly.

"What's security between friends? I'll give you a demand note."

Mr. Starkweather stopped drumming.

"Mix, you oughtn't be borrowin' from me; that's what your bank's for. What's wrong—business rotten?"

"*Too* good," said Mr. Mix frankly. "It's taking all my capital to carry my customers. And you know how tight money is."

"Oh, yes. Well—I guess your credit's good for five, all right. Make out your note. Interest at six per cent., semiannually."

TEN minutes later, Mr. Starkweather, alone in his office, drew a stertorous breath and slumped down in his chair.

It was a fortnight, now, since Henry's last letter. He wished that Henry would write oftener. He told himself that one of Henry's letters would furnish an antidote to Mirabelle. And he needed an antidote, for recently Mirabelle had been surpassing herself.

He took another deep breath, and then suddenly he was swept by an emotion which took him wholly by surprise and almost overcame him. He sat up, and began to wonder where he could find some occupation to chink up the crevices in his thoughts and prevent himself from introspection. Eventually he hit upon it, and with a conscious effort he pulled himself out of his chair and went over to Masonic Hall to meet his sister Mirabelle.

She had been attending a conference of the Ethical Reform League, and as Mr. Starkweather's car drew in to the curb, the reformers were just emerging to the sidewalk.

His sister caught sight of him and waved her hand in greeting, an unexpected show of animation.

Mr. Starkweather made room for her.

"Thought I'd give you a lift back to the house," he said.

There was an unusual color in her cheeks, and her eyes were brilliant.

"John, do you know what I am?"

"No. What?"

"I'm the—president," she said, and her voice was trembling with pride.

"President? Of the league?"

"Elected this morning." She stared at him and stiffened. "Of course, I know *you* aren't interested in anything helpful or progressive, so I don't expect to be congratulated. Of course not!"

He made a dutiful struggle to be joyous about it, and succeeded only in producing a feeble smirk.

"Well, what's your program?"

She unbent a little and began to recite her platform. She didn't stop when the car stopped, or when Mr. Starkweather climbed down stiffly and held open the door for her, or even when they had reached the portico of the big brick house. He told himself, dumbly, that if the world would ever listen to Mirabelle, it would certainly reform—in self-defense.

At lunch he was distressed and joyless, but he found it easier to rise above his body than above his mind.

"Got a little present for you," said Mr. Starkweather abruptly, and tossed a slip of paper to her. "There's a string to it, though—I want you to hold it a while."

She looked up skeptically.

"Suppose it's any good?"

"Oh, it's *good* enough. Mix is all right. Only, I don't want you to press him for three, four months, anyhow." He pushed away his dessert, untasted. "You know why I'm givin' you these dibs and dabs every now and then, don't you? So if anything ever happens to me all of a sudden, you'll have somethin' to draw on. Let's see; I've put about forty in the fund I been buildin' up for you, and given you twelve—" He broke off and put his hand to his head; his own symptoms puzzled him.

His sister had already been sitting bolt upright, but now she achieved an even greater rigidity.

"When you saw Mr. Archer this morning, did you take my advice about your will? Did you do what I told you to—about Henry?"

He was struggling to keep a grip on himself.

"Well, no—not exactly."

"Oh, you didn't?" she said tartly. "Well, what *did* you do?"

"Mirabelle," said her brother, "don't you think that's—just a little mite personal?"

"Well, I meant it to be. After the way Henry's acted, he don't deserve one bit of sympathy, or one dollar from anybody. And if *I've* got anything to say, he won't get it, either."

Mr. Starkweather's round, fat face wore an expression which his sister hadn't seen before. He stood up, holding to the back of his chair.

"Mirabelle, you haven't got a word to say about it. I've stood this just about as long as I'm goin' to. Henry's my own flesh and blood. And, furthermore, he wouldn't waste my money a minute quicker'n you would." He wet his lips. "He'd do a damn sight better with it. He'd make somebody happy with it, and you'd burn it up in some confounded propaganda scheme. Well, all I've got's a sister and a nephew; so I guess my money's goin' to be wasted. But Henry's goin' to get a fair break, and don't you forget it." He took a glass of water from the table and spilled half of it. "Don't you forget it!"

At last she had perception.

"John! Are you sick?"

He was swallowing repeatedly.

"Yes, I am. Sick of the whole thing." His eyes and the hue of his cheeks genuinely alarmed her; she went to him, but he avoided her. "No; I don't want anything except to be let alone. Is the car out there?"

"But, John—listen to me——"

He waved her off.

"I listened to you the day Henry came home, Mirabelle. That's enough to last me quite some time. Where's my hat?" He rushed past her and out of the house, and left her gaping after him.

Half an hour later, young Mr. Standish telephoned to her.

"Miss Starkweather? . . . Your brother's feeling pretty bad, and I've just sent him home. Wouldn't be a bad idea to have your doctor there, seems to me."

She had the doctor there, and before the night was over there was another doctor in consultation. There were also two nurses. And to both doctors, both nurses and Mirabelle, Mr. Starkweather, who knew his destiny, whispered the same message at intervals of fifteen minutes:

"Don't have Henry come back—don't have Henry come back—no sense his comin' back till August. Tell him I said so."

And then, in the cool, fresh morning, Mr. Starkweather suddenly tried to sit up.

"Postman!" he said thickly and with much difficulty.

He was waiting for a letter from Henry, and when they put it into his hands, he smiled and was content. He hadn't the strength to open it, and he wouldn't let any one else touch it; he was satisfied to know that Henry had written. And after that there was nothing worth waiting for.

IT NEVER occurred to Henry, when he came home in late July, to take his wife to the big brick house which had been his uncle's. He didn't know whether the house would go to Aunt Mirabelle or to himself, and for the time being it was immaterial; Aunt Mirabelle was welcome to possession of it undisturbed. The judge's house was a third the size, and not the least prepossessing, and there really wasn't room for the young Devereuxs in it, but as soon as Henry stepped inside the door, he knew that he was welcome.

He was sorry for his aunt, and he went to see her immediately, but even in this new situation she let him know that she disapproved of him thoroughly and permanently. She wasn't reconciled to his marriage; she didn't care to receive Anna, and, more than that, she succeeded in making Henry feel that by his conduct he had hurried his uncle into an untimely grave.

"And of course," she said, "you've been to call on Mr. Archer, haven't you?"

Henry flushed indignantly.

"I hadn't even thought about it."

"Well, when you do, you'll hear some fine news." Her lip curled. "Your friend Bob Standish's bought the business. *Some* of it, anyway. Bought it on a shoe-string's *my* guess—but he's bought it."

"Good for Bob!" He was thinking that if honest toil were demanded of him, nothing could be more pleasant than an alliance with this same Standish.

Aunt Mirabelle sniffed.

"Good for nothing! He's most as scatter-brained as you are." Henry declined the combat, and she went on aggrievedly: "The rest of the whole estate's tied up in a trust, but Mr. Archer wouldn't tell me much about it till you came home. All I know's what everybody knows; it's tied up for a year, to see what you're going to do. But from what he hinted, it's perfectly possible that all I'll get is a few thousand outright and what John gave me in a little separate fund and a year's income from the whole estate. I suppose you think that's perfectly fair and right and just. Naturally you would."

In his present mood, Henry was immune to astonishment.

"I don't believe it's up to me to criticize Uncle John, whatever he did."

"Not under the circumstances—no. You've got some idiotic test or other you've got to go through—and I sit back and fold my hands and wait a year to see what you get, and what *I* get. Even this house—" Her smile was bitter. Originally, as she knew, her brother had intended to bequeath Henry a fourth of his property and herself the remainder. "Well," she said, "I wish you every happiness and success, Henry. I suppose you feel in your conscience you deserve it, don't you?"

When he left her, he was aware that the last tie had been severed.

MR. ARCHER greeted Henry with a proper mixture of repression and cordiality.

"But I'm afraid," he said to the boy; "I'm afraid you're going to be a little disappointed."

Henry shook his head.

"Then you've sized me up all wrong," he said, subdued. "Because, no matter what I get, I'm going to be satisfied that Uncle John wanted me to have it. I'd imagined it was probably an interest in the business, but Bob Standish—I saw him just a few minutes ago—says it isn't."

"No; it's a building. Three sixty-one Main Street. That is, it's a building and a business together. It's yours outright; the deed's all recorded. You see, Henry, your Uncle John made an entirely separate provision for Miss Starkweather. She'll never go hungry; but the bulk of the estate depends on what you do with this business in the next year. Your—quota, if I may call it that, is a book-profit of ten thousand dollars."

"You mean—whether I share in the estate or not depends on my making ten thousand dollars inside of a year?"

"Yes; and without any outside help except straight commercial loans—if you can get 'em."

"What building is it, Mr. Archer?"

The lawyer wiped his glasses.

"It's one he took over on a mortgage last winter. You see, Henry, he'd figured out what he was going to do with you, and he redrew his will so you'd have the same proposition whether he lived or died. He picked out what he thought would do you the most good—break down some of your—excuse me for being blunt—class-prejudice—teach you how many dimes there are in a dollar."

Henry looked serious.

"Three sixty-one Main—I don't seem to— What on earth *is* it, Mr. Archer?"

"Go down and look at it. Only, don't be shocked, Henry; because it's exactly what he'd have given you to do, anyway. By the way, have you any money of your own?"

"I'm down to a couple of hundred. Why?" Henry looked sober.

"Then you'd better not waste any time. Go on down and look it over this morning, and let me know."

"Why—let you know what?"

"Whether you're going to take the dare. Because, of course, if you shouldn't feel inclined to go ahead on your uncle's plan—and that would disappoint me—you could simply sell out. I hope very much indeed that you won't. But—go look at it. And one last thing, Henry—your uncle put the thing in this shape so too many people wouldn't be talking about it."

Obediently, Henry proceeded down Main Street. His curiosity was active, but he was warning himself to be on guard. But whatever the business might be, and however distasteful, there was only a year of it. He never doubted for an instant that he should succeed; for he knew that his uncle would never have prescribed a task which was beyond his powers.

Yes; it was a just and reasonable arrangement, provided that his business, whatever it was, wouldn't entirely prevent him from keeping up with the procession socially, and playing enough golf to hold his present form.

When he arrived at Three sixty-one, his optimism dried up in his throat. He had been prepared for anything but the reality. The ark of his fortunes was a shabby little motion-picture theatre!

Great heavens! Was it possible that John Starkweather had condemned Henry the fashionable, Henry the clubable, Henry the exclusive to a year of *this?* Was *this* his punishment for the past? Was *this* the price of his future?

His power of reason was almost atrophied. Previously he had paid his forfeits with the best of good nature, but his previous forfeits hadn't obliged him to declass himself. They hadn't involved Anna. Why, his uncle had planned to put them in a social pillory, targets for those who had either admired them or envied them. It would make them the most conspicuous pair in the community. And Anna—Anna who was so ambitious for him—how could *she* endure the status of a cheap showman's wife?

And even if he had been willing to ally himself with such a business, how could he conceivably make ten thousand dollars out of it in a single year? The place was far too small to support an experienced man for manager and still to net an appreciable profit. Mr. Starkweather had undoubtedly foreseen that Henry couldn't sit back as a magnate and pile responsibility on a paid employee. No; the business was impossible; the quota was impossible; the entire project from first to last was unthinkable. His uncle, whether by accident or design, had virtually disowned him. There was no other answer.

Mr. Starkweather had schemed to bring about a certain reaction, and he had overplayed his hand. He had set a standard so high and chosen a medium so low that he had defeated his own object.

The next step—why, it was to chart his life all over again. It was to dispose of this ridiculous property and begin to make a living for Anna. And there was no time to lose, either, for Henry's checking balance was about to slide past the vanishing-point.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to meet the luminously sympathetic eyes of Mr. Theodore Mix.

MR. Mix was fresh from an interview with Miss Mirabelle Starkweather. Her acquaintance with him was slight, but from a distance she had always esteemed him. Her esteem, however, applied to him merely as an individual, and not as a debtor.

"I wanted to see you about a note," she said primly; "your five-thousand-dollar demand note my brother endorsed over to me four months ago."

Mr. Mix allowed his mouth to widen in a smile which was disarmingly benevolent. The horse at Bowie had proved dark indeed—so dark that it had still been merged with the background when the winner passed the judges' stand—and this color-test had cost Mr. Mix precisely two thousand dollars. Beyond that, he had paid off a few of his creditors, and he had spent a week in New York, where he had taken the contemplated flier in cotton and made a disastrous forced landing, so that there was practically nothing but his smile between himself and bankruptcy. Yet Mr. Mix beamed, and put saccharin in his voice.

"Ordinarily, I'm embarrassed to talk business with a woman," said Mr. Mix. "I'm so conscious of the—what shall I say?—of a woman's disadvantage in a business interview. But in your case, Miss Starkweather, when your executive ability is so well known and so universally praised——"

She took it without discount, but she wasn't distracted from her purpose.

"I hope it's convenient for you to pay it, Mr. Mix. I want it for a special reason."

"If it weren't convenient," said Mr. Mix, soothingly, "I should *make* it convenient. When the sister of my oldest friend—and the special reason is one of your favorite charities, I have no doubt. Now, let's see— I'll have to sell some securities. When must you have it?"

"Next Tuesday."

Mr. Mix looked dubious.

"Tuesday? Now—that is—wait a minute." He created the impression that he was juggling vast affairs. "Is Tuesday imperative?"

"Tuesday, by ten o'clock in the morning."

His face cleared.

"You've shared a secret with me," said Mr. Mix, and although he spoke aloud, his attitude was as though he was whispering. "Because I happen to know that every Tuesday at ten o'clock there's a meeting of a—a certain organization of which you're the illustrious president." He lowered his voice. "I ask your pardon for the intrusion of anything of such a delicately personal nature, Miss Starkweather, but I must tell you that when a person, such as yourself, even in the midst of inconsolable sorrow, can't forget that great principles and great institutions can never perish, but are immortal, and go on forever—that's true nobility of character, Miss Starkweather, and I honor you for it."

She touched her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Thank you, Mr. Mix. Yes; I intend to make a contribution to our league—in memory of my brother. You're—familiar with our league?"

He gestured effectively.

"Familiar with it?"

"And are you—in sympathy with it?"

"My dear lady, I was one of the pioneer supporters of suffrage in this region. I——"

"Yes; I know that, and I know your work in the Associated Charities and in your church, but—how did you vote on prohibition?"

He side-stepped with great agility.

"How would any man of my caliber vote?"

"True, true!" She was becoming more alert. "But we've got tremendous problems yet to solve. Do you believe in enforcing the laws, Mr. Mix?"

"Dear lady, show me a man who *doesn't* believe in enforcing the laws, and I won't argue with him—I couldn't count on his sincerity."

"It's a pleasure to talk to a man like you," she said. "I wonder if you agree with our other ethical reforms. Er—what do you think about dancing?"

He had a good phrase which he had been saving up for six weeks.

"Dancing," he said, "is popular because it's so conspicuously innocent—and so warmly satisfactory to the guilty."

"Good! *Good!* How about tobacco?"

This, too, he side-stepped.

"It's a poison, so the doctors say. Who am I to put my opinion against theirs?"

She was regarding him earnestly.

"How is it, then, you've never joined the league?"

"I—I've never been invited," said Mr. Mix, taken aback.

"Then *I* invite you," she said promptly. "It's men like you we need—prominent, useful citizens."

"I appreciate the distinction of your asking me," said Mr. Mix, with deference. "And if you have time, I wish you'd tell me what your aims are. I am *very* deeply interested."

He stayed another half-hour, during which the conversation never swerved from the entertaining subject of reform. Mr. Mix was bored and restless, but he kept his mind doggedly on the topic and dispensed honey by the shovelful. When he prepared to leave, he reminded her gently,

"Now, in regard to that note——"

Mirabelle was blinded by her own visionings and deafened by her own eloquence.

"Well, we'll have to take that up again. But you come to the meeting Tuesday, anyhow. And here's one of our pamphlets for you to look at in the mean time."

As he went down the steps, she was watching him from the ambush of lace window-curtains, and she was saying to herself: "Such a nice man—so influential, too. Now, if I could get him persuaded over——"

Mr. Mix, strolling down-town, was also talking to himself.

'What I've got to do," said Mr. Mix thoughtfully, "is to string the old dame along until I can raise five thousand dollars. But where's it coming from?"

Then, squarely in front of the Orpheum Theatre, he met Henry Devereux.

"GOOD-morning, Henry," said Mr. Mix gravely. "First time I've had a chance to speak to you since—" He coughed discreetly. "I don't believe I need to say that if there's anything I can do for you, all you've got to do is to say so."

Privately, Henry had always considered Mr. Mix as a *poseur*, but he knew that Mr. Mix belonged to the Citizens Club, which was the local standard, and that for thirty years he had various business relations with Mr. Starkweather.

"All right," he said. "Tell me how soon I can sell this overgrown magic-lantern outfit—and what I can get for it—and where I can put the money to bring in the biggest income—and where I can get a good job."

Now, all this was purely in the nature of a rhetorical question; for, naturally, if Henry decided to sell, he would want Bob Standish to get the commission, and also, if Henry needed employment, he would go to his friend and be sure of a cordial reception. But Mr. Mix took it literally.

Furthermore, Mr. Mix's memory began to unfold. It was on the tip of his tongue to blurt out, "And lose your shot at the estate?" but he restrained himself. He wasn't supposed to know the circumstances, and he was probably the only outsider who did know them.

"Why," he said, "do *you* own the Orpheum? Well, I should say offhand it's worth a good deal. Say, twenty thousand. The land, you know; the building's no good."

"Yes; but who'd buy it?"

"Well, now, about *that*—of course, I'm not a real-estate man—but you could certainly trade it."

"What for?"

Mr. Mix thought rapidly.

"Well—say for a third interest in Theodore Mix & Company."

Henry caught him up.

"Are you serious?"

Mr. Mix almost fell over backward.

"Why, yes. It's sudden, but—why, yes. I could use more capital, and I want a crack salesman. I'll trade—if you're quick on the trigger. I've got two or three people interested so far, but when it's *you*——"

Henry took him by the arm.

"Come on over to the Citizens Club, then, and we'll talk about it."

WHEN Henry went home to his wife and his father-in-law, he was confident that he had made a bargain. Within the next five minutes, however, he was sitting limp and baffled.

"Holy smoke!" he said weakly. "I didn't suppose you'd take it like that. Why, I—I feel as if I'd been run over by a steam-roller with Taft at the wheel!"

Judge Barklay had long since forgiven his daughter, but he hadn't quite forgiven Henry.

"Do you want my honest opinion? I should say you're suffering from two extreme causes—exaggerated ego and cold feet."

Henry flushed. He had the most profound respect for Judge Barklay.

"You don't mean you think I'd run the miserable little peanut-stand, do you?"

"It strikes me," said the judge, "that both of us would a good deal rather have you run a peanut-stand than—I'm using your own analogy—than spend your whole life eating peanuts."

Henry looked at his wife.

"What are *you* going to suggest? Hire a snake-charmer and a wild man from Borneo and an infant pachyderm and a royal ring-tailed gyasticutus, and pull off a side-show after the main tent's closed?"

"Oh, Henry! Can't you *see* what a lark it would be?"

"Lark?" he repeated, hazily. "Lark? You've got the wrong bird. It's crow."

"No; but, Henry dear, you aren't going to give up a fortune without even trying, are you?"

"Do you realize what you're talking about? It would cost a thousand dollars just to make the place clean. It'll cost three or four more to make it attractive enough to get anybody inside of it. And I haven't got the price."

"What's the matter with a mortgage?" demanded the judge. "And you've got a car, haven't you? You've got a saddle-horse. Turn them into money."

"On a wild gamble? Why, Anna, we'd have to go live in some cheap apartment. And you know what the crowd on the hill would say."

"Well," said Anna, "I'm willing to live in such a cheap apartment that the landlord calls it a flat. And you can't get any servants these days; there *aren't* any. And when we've got to be amused, why couldn't we go to the Orpheum?" They all laughed, but Anna was the first to stop. "I'll work just as hard as you will, Henry. I'll peel potatoes and wash the sink"—she glanced ruefully at her hands—"and if it'll help you, I—I'd sell tickets or be an usher or play the piano. Why, Henry, it would be a *circus*——"

"*And* an education," said Judge Barklay.

"And a gold mine for us—in just one little year. We could do it; I *know* we could."

"Henry"—the judge was using a professional gesture—"what do you suppose your time is worth at its present market value? Don't you think you can afford to risk a year of it against half a million dollars?"

"But when I've practically closed with Mix."

"Sign any agreement?"

"No; he's having one typed."

The judge breathed in relief.

'You're lucky. People think he's got money, but he hasn't. He's broke. He must have picked you for a life-preserver."

Henry's jaw dropped.

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't think so; I *know* so. His New York correspondents used to be clients of mine, and they've both asked me about him and told me about him inside of the last six weeks."

Henry sat unblinking.

"Is that—a fact?"

"And if you wanted to sell out," continued the judge, with a trifle of asperity, "why on earth didn't you go to an expert—to Bob Standish? And why didn't you have an audit made of Mix's company—why didn't you know what you were buying? Oh, it isn't too late, if you haven't signed anything, but, Henry, you need a guardian."

At the sight of his face, Anna went over to him and perched on the arm of his chair.

"That's enough, dad. I'm his guardian; ain't I, dear? And he's just upset and dizzy, and I don't blame him a bit. We won't say another word about it; we've told him what we think. And to-morrow he can have a long talk with Bob. You're feeling awfully ashamed of yourself for being so hasty—and snobbish. *I* know you."

Henry looked across at the judge.

"All right. We'll let the whole thing ride till I've seen Bob."

HIS friend Bob Standish was a young man who had achieved success by the reason that mere acquaintances and strangers invariably underestimated him. For one thing, his skin was so tender, his eyes so blue and innocent, his mouth so wide and sensitive, his forehead so white and high that he gave the impression of almost childish simplicity and ingenuousness. For another thing, he dressed with such regard for the fashion and he moved about with such indolent amiability that his clothes and his manners drew attention from what was underneath.

And so, at college, kindly sophomores had volunteered to teach him poker, and couldn't understand why the profits went not to the teacher but to the pupil.

In commerce, he had risen in six years from the grade of city-insurance solicitor to that of Mr. Starkweather's principal assistant. Now, as casually as he had ever raked in a jack-pot from the bewildered sophomores, he had bought the Starkweather business, and not on a shoe-string, either.

He had roomed with Henry at college; he had been his inseparable companion out of office-hours ever since; he knew him too well to proffer any trite condolence. But his sympathy was firm and warm in his fingers when he shook hands, and Henry got the message.

"Thought probably you'd rather not have me at the train," said Standish, "so I didn't come. Right or wrong?"

"Right, Bob! Well, I hear you're the big boss around here. Please, mister, gimme a job?"

"Nothing I'd like better," said Standish. "I've got just the thing for you. Sit in a box over on the window-sill and be a lily. Flowers brighten up an office so."

"You misjudge me. Didn't you know I'm going to work?"

Standish's eyes were round and guileless.

"See any sea-serpents on your way over?"

"Fact, though, I am. I'd hoped it was going to be here."

Young Mr. Standish, however, had watched his employer very closely during those last few days, and in witnessing Mr. Starkweather's will he had sensed intuitively that it contained a stick of dynamite for Henry. Also, of course, he shared the public information of the existence, if not the actual conditions, of the trust fund.

"As a matter of fact, Henry, what are you going to do?"

"That's what I came in to find out," said Henry. "Have you got time to listen?"

His friend Standish listened to the story, and at no time during the recital did he laugh or exclaim or indicate that he shared any of Henry's conclusions.

"Oh, yes," he said; "people might giggle a bit. But they always giggle at a man's first job, anyway. Like his first pair of long trousers. It's done. But how many times will they do it? A thousand? Ten thousand? A hundred thousand? At that rate, you'd draw down a dividend of seven dollars a giggle? For less than that, *I'd* be a Barnum myself. Henry, you do what they tell you to."

"Would you do it if you were in my place?"

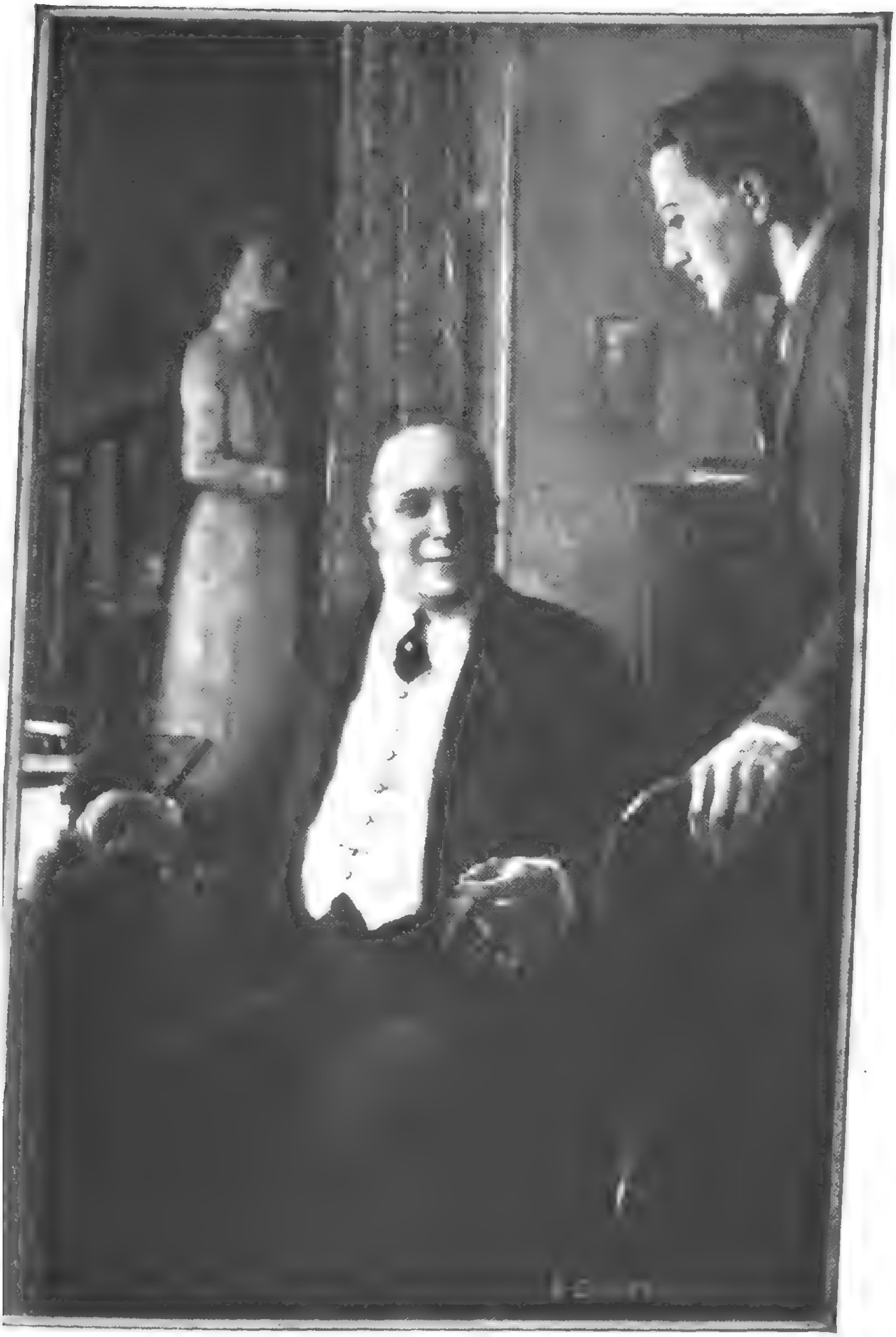
"Would I let people say I hadn't sand enough to stop a wrist-watch?"

"I know; but, Bob—the Orpheum!"

"I know; but, Henry——"

At this precise instant Henry was required on the telephone. It was his Aunt Mirabelle; and even if he had been engaged in an audience with royalty, she would still have called him—if she could have got the address.

"Henry," she said. "I've just found out what kind of arrangement your uncle made for you. Mr. Archer just told me. I didn't know your uncle was ever mixed up in that kind of thing. And of all the hellish



s uncle sat down and surveyed him with great indulgence. "What's the idea?" he asked humorously. **"You ain't gone off and got yourself married already, have you?" "Yes, Uncle John."**

influences in this day and generation—and the *idea* of having it settled like *that*——"

"Well," said Henry, "it isn't any of it my fault, is it?"

"That remains to be seen. I certainly hope you aren't going to spread that news around town. Well—are you going to run that—dive?"

"Why—I don't know. If I didn't——"

"Oh, yes; you're probably telling yourself how selfish I am. But to think of a Devereux—*almost* the same thing as a Starkweather——"

"What's your idea?"

"There's this much to say, Henry—at least I'd put John's money to a nobler use than you ever would."

Henry grimaced.

"Your league?"

"Yes. What else?"

He was an impulsive young man, and sometimes he made up his mind by contraries.

"I wouldn't count too much on it," he said shortly. "I might astonish you."

"You—Henry Devereux! Am I going to see my own sister's son in an enterprise like——"

"You're going to see your own grandfather's great-grandson make P. T. Barnum look like a Kickapoo medicine-man—if necessary," said Henry.

"You *are* going to operate that place?"

"Why, certainly," said Henry.

MR. THEODORE MIX gazed with funereal gloom at the typewritten agreement which lay before him, unsigned. It was barely twenty minutes ago that Mr. Mix had risen to welcome the man who was to save his credit and his reputation; but during those twenty minutes Mr. Mix, who had felt that he was sitting on top of the world, had been unceremoniously shot off into space.

His creditors surrounded him, and his brokerage business was pounding against the rocks. Quietly, overnight, he had located a purchaser for the Orpheum, and as soon as Henry's name had been safe on the dotted line, Mr. Mix would have been financed for many months ahead. And then came Henry——"

For the moment, he subordinated his personal problems to his wrath at Henry; for if Henry had simply scrawled his signature, Mr. Mix would have made a good deal of money.

"I'm going to get him for that," said Mr. Mix, half aloud. "I'm going to get him, and get him *good*. I'd have been square with the world and paid off that infernal note and had four thousand dollars left over." His lips made a straight line. "And he'd have brought fifty thousand dollars' worth of business into this office—he'd have *had* to—to protect his ante. Yes, sir; I'm going to get him *good*."

Mr. Mix sat up and emitted a short, mirthless laugh. He frowned reflectively, and then, after a little search, he exhumed the pamphlet which Mirabelle had given him and skimmed through the pages until he came to the paragraph he had in mind. Enforcement of the Sunday ordinances—hm. Present ordinance seems to prohibit Sunday theatrical performances of all kinds, but city administrations have always been lax.

Mr. Mix sat back and pondered. He knew enough about the Orpheum to know that Henry's quota would be literally impossible if Sundays were taken from the schedule. The league's blue-law campaign, if it proved successful, would make Henry Devereux even bluer than Mr. Mix.

Another brilliant thought infected him. He had long since passed the stage in which women were a mystery to him. He had long since argued that there is nothing more mysterious about women than about men. It was all humbug—all this mummery about intuitions and unerring perception and inscrutability. He assured himself that the only real difference in women lies in the particular brand of flattery to which, as individuals, they react.

Take Miss Starkweather—he had seen that if he flattered her enough in regard to her league presidency, she blazed up into a flame which consumed even her purpose in causing the interview. By no remarkable effort he had been able to divert her attention; and it was now imperative for him to keep it diverted until he had raised five thousand dollars. And if she were so susceptible, why shouldn't Mr. Mix venture a trifle farther?

On Sunday he went formally to call on her, and, by exercise of the most finished diplomacy, he succeeded in building up the situation exactly as he had planned it. The note hadn't been mentioned; the league hadn't been given a breathing-space, and Mirabelle was pleading with him to see the light and join the crusade. Finally she leaned forward and put her hand on his arm.

"Two weeks ago," she said, "I told the league I was going to give it a real surprise this next Tuesday. What I meant was the money for that note. But I'd hate to make you sell any securities when they're down so low. And, besides, anybody can give money—just *money*. What we need most is men. You're one of the big men here. You count for a good deal. We want you. I said I'd give 'em a surprise—let me make the league a present of *you*!" She bestowed upon him a smile which was a startling combination of sharpness and appeal. "I'm certainly going to keep my promise, Mr. Mix. I'm going to give 'em one surprise or the other—you or the five thousand. Only, I tell you in all sincerity, I'd rather it would be you."

Mr. Mix sat up with a jerk. The climax had been reached too soon.

"Dear lady——"

"You can't refuse," she went, on with an emphasis which sobered him. "We want you for an officer and a director. And you can't refuse. You believe everything we believe. Mr. Mix, look me in the eye and tell me—if you're true to yourself, how *can* you refuse?"

"That isn't it," he said, truthfully enough. "I—I wouldn't be as valuable to you as you think."

"We'll judge of that."

He hunted desperately for an opening.

"And—in any event, I couldn't become an officer, or even a director. I——"

"Why not, pray?"

"I haven't the time, for one thing, or the experience in——"

She swept away his objections with a stiff gesture.

"You're modest, and it's becoming. But if you're with us, you ought to show your colors. And if you *are* with us, you'll lead us, because you're a born leader. And for the sake of the common welfare—" She paused. He was staring at her as if hypnotized.

He owed her five thousand dollars, and if she demanded payment, he was a bankrupt.

"Why does it mean so much to you?" he asked, sparring for time. "You spoke about leadership. No one can hope to replace yourself."

She shook her head."

"No woman can lead a campaign like the one we're just starting. It takes a strong, dominant man who knows politics. Of course, when we go after dancing and cards and dress-reform, I guess I can do all right, but in *this* campaign——"

"What campaign is this, Miss Starkweather?"

"Sunday enforcement."

Mr. Mix pursed his lips.

"Really? Close all the theatres and everything?"

"Tight!" she said, and the word was like the lash of a whip. "Tight as a drum!"

Mr. Mix controlled himself.

"You'll have to pardon my seeming effrontery, but"—he coughed behind his hand—"that might bring about a very unhappy—family complication. Had you thought of it?"

"Henry? Humph. Yes. But I don't propose to let my family stand in the way of my principles."

HIS expression was wooden, but it concealed a thought which had flashed up spontaneously to dazzle him. The financial downfall of Henry meant the financial elevation of Mirabelle. He couldn't quite destroy a picture of Mirabelle walking down the aisle out of step to the wedding-march.

And he was busy with the consciousness that at last he was in a position to capitalize his inside information. He knew what nobody else did, outside of Henry and his wife, Mirabelle, Mr. Archer and probably Judge Barklay. And if he flung himself into the league's campaign, what might he not accomplish?

Mr. Mix drew a very long breath, and in the space of ten seconds thought ahead for a year.

"If I could only spare the time to help you—but, you see, this is my dull season. I have to work twice as hard as usual to make an honest dollar."

"Would you accept an honorarium?"

"Beg pardon?"

"If you took charge of the drive, would you accept a salary? And give us most of your time? Say, four days a week?"

Once more his thoughts raced through the year.

"Now," he said, presently, "you *are* making it hard for me to refuse."

"Only that? Haven't I made it impossible?"

To Mr. Mix, her tone was almost more of a challenge than an invitation. At last he nodded.

"I think—you have."

She held out her hand.

"I've always respected you as a man. Now I greet you as a comrade. We'll make this city a place where a pure-minded man or woman won't be ashamed to live. I tell you, I won't be satisfied until we reach the ideal! And prohibition was only one tiny move in advance, and we've miles to go. I'm glad we're going the rest of the way together. And it wouldn't surprise me in the least if you came out of it mayor. That's *my* idea."

Mr. Mix backed away.

"Oh, no; I don't dream of that," he said. "But I feel as if I'd taken one of the most significant steps of my whole life. I—I think I'd better say good-afternoon, Miss Starkweather. I want to be alone—and meditate. You understand?"

"Like Galahad," she murmured.

Mr. Mix looked puzzled; he thought she had a cold.

He went home to his bachelor apartment, and after he had helped himself to three full fingers of meditation, together with a little seltzer, he smiled faintly and told himself that there was no use in debating the point—a man with brains is predestined to make progress. But he couldn't help reflecting that now, more than ever, if any echo of his ordinary habits got to Mirabelle's ears—or, for that matter, to anybody's ears at all—his dreams would float away in vapor. Perhaps it would be wise to explain to Mirabelle that he had once been a sinner. She would probably forgive him, and appreciate him all the more. Women do. It was curious that she had mentioned him as a possible mayor. It had been his dearest ambition. He wondered if, with the league behind him, there weren't at least a chance.

NO POWER on the face of the earth could have driven Henry Devereux to the operation of a picture-theatre strictly as a business venture; but when he once got it into his head that the Orpheum wasn't so much a business as a sporting proposition, he couldn't have been stopped by anything short of an injunction.

He was inspirited, moreover, by the attitude of his friends. To be sure, they took the situation as a very good joke on Henry, but at the same time, because gossip had built up a theory to explain that situation, there were several of them who wished that a similar joke, with a similar nubbin, might be played on themselves. They assured Henry that, if there were any justice in the Sunday-school books, he was certain to finish in the money; and Henry, who had provided himself with several air-tight alibis, found them dead stock on his hands.

This consciousness of loyal backing, however, didn't prevent him from dismay when, on the very morning that he took control of his property, a seven-column streamer-head-line leaped out of the *Herald* to threaten him.

SUNDAY AMUSEMENTS MUST GO!

MIX, PROMINENT BUSINESS MAN, TURNS REFORMER

THEODORE MIX CHOSEN TO MANAGE CAMPAIGN OF LEAGUE

PLEDGES ENFORCEMENT OF CITY ORDINANCES TO THE LETTER

Bob Standish tried to laugh it off for him, but Henry hadn't a smile in his system.

"All right, then," said Standish. "Go see the judge. He'll tell you the same thing. Mix's nothing but an old blowhard."

"Maybe he is," conceded Henry. "But I'd be just as satisfied if he blew in some other direction."

He took the paper to Judge Barklay.

"Oh, no," said the judge; "I'm not astonished. When a man's in hot enough water, he'll cut up almost any kind of caper to get out. And Mix is a politician. I'd say it's a pretty good refuge for him, and you drove him to it."

"Well—does he mean what he says there?"

"Not too much of it. If he does half he says he will, he'll lose his job. The town would be so pure there wouldn't be any league."

"How about that ordinance?"

"Oh, that! It's so old it's toothless. The City Council doesn't quite dare repeal it, but they don't want it enforced."

Henry frowned.

"That's all right. But suppose they

arrested somebody under the ordinance. What would *you* do?"

"Fine 'em, of course. I'd have to. But I've never had such a case that I can remember."

Henry continued serious.

"Oh, I guess I can sleep nights without any paregoric, but what right have they got to butt into the only day of recreation the working people have?"

The judge laughed quietly.

"Whence all this sudden affection for the poor working man, Henry?"

Henry reddened.

"Strictly between ourselves, I don't like the idea of this Sunday business, anyway. But, unfortunately, that's the big day."

"Of course," admitted the judge, "it's poor policy to have a law on the books and then ignore it. A good law ought to be kept; a bad one ought to be repealed."

"Yes—and here I'm raising a mortgage and spending the money on improvements that'll hold us up more than two weeks—and here Anna and I are going to live in a box stall—and here I've been going to commercial school every afternoon for two solid hours—and here I've resigned from the golf club and everything else but the Citizens—and if they do put the kibosh on Sunday shows, why, I'll be elected to the Hohenzollern Club."

"They won't do it, Henry. They're too radical. They're not talking reform; they're talking revolution—and people can't be pushed that far. When that crowd was first organized, it started out to be a bandwagon and it could have done a lot of good, but now it's marching so fast that pretty soon they'll find out they've winded everybody else and there isn't any parade. All they need is rope. Give 'em enough of it, and they'll hang themselves. And that speech of Mix's has done more harm to the league than it has good. You go right ahead with your improvements."

AND yet Henry delayed for a day or two the signing of his agreement for the alterations; and in the mean time he saw Mr. Archer and got an interpretation of the trust. Mr. Archer was sorry; but if Sundays were ruled out, there was no provision for reducing the quota, and Henry would have to stand or fall on the exact phraseology. Henry was apprehensive, but he had another session with the judge, and three a day with Anna, and one with the largest exhibitor in town, and eventually he was persuaded that his fears were unjustified.

Through Standish, he negotiated a mortgage which would cover the cost of the work and leave a comfortable balance.

"We're not going to be as poor as I thought we were," he said cheerfully to Anna. "We've got something in the bank for emergencies—and ten thousand a year is two hundred a week besides."

Anna was horrified.

"You didn't think we'd *spend* what we make, did you?"

"Why not? Uncle John didn't say we had to show ten thousand in coin at the end of the year; he said I had to make it—on the books. We can spend every copeck of it, if we want to. And I was about to say that with six thousand dollars left over from the mortgage money, we'll have a maid after all."

Anna glanced at her hands and shook her head obstinately.

"No, dear. Because what we save now might be our only capital later."

"But we're going to win! We're going to exert our resistless wills to the utmost. What's the use of being tightwads?"

"But if we shouldn't win, look where we'd be! No, dear; we're going to save our pennies. That's why I picked out this apartment; that's why I'm doing as much as I can with it myself. It's the only safe way. And just look around—haven't I done wonders with almost nothing at all?"

Henry looked around, not that his memory was at fault but because he was perpetually dumfounded by her genius. The living-room was charming; and her greatest joy and Henry's marvel was that the furnishings had cost so little, and that so much was her own handiwork.

"Yes; but pause and reflect," said Henry. "I've sold the big car and bought a tin-plated runabout. I've sold my horse. I've sold ten tons of old clothes. Financially speaking, I'm as liquid as a pellucid pool in a primeval forest. Can't we even have a cook?"

"No, dear. We've got to play safe. It's all part of the game. Don't you see it is?"

Eventually he agreed with her, and went back to the Orpheum, where workmen were remodeling the interior and patching up the façade. He stood for a moment to watch the loading of a truck with broken seats, jig-saw decorations and the remains of a battered projector. He looked up presently to the sign over the entrance:

CLOSED DURING ALTERATIONS. GRAND OPENING, SUNDAY AFTERNOON, AUGUST 20th. SOUVENIRS

There was no disputing the fact that all his eggs were in one basket, and that if the Reform League started to throw stones at it, they would find it a broad mark.

It was his first experience with the building trades, and he was innocent enough to believe in schedules and estimates. In less than a fortnight, however, he came home to his wife in a mood which she was quick to detect.

"Oh, I'm just peevish," said Henry. "The contractor says it'll take four weeks instead of three, and cost six thousand instead of forty-five hundred. But there's no use wearing a long face about it. If I did, I didn't mean to."

Anna slipped out of her big apron.

"Of course you didn't. I just *knew!*"

"As a matter of fact," he said, "my face feels long enough to fit in a churn. Only, I thought I'd put on a mask of gaiety that was absolutely impenetrable. Well, what's happened in the ancestral home to-day?"

She had burned a steak and both thumbs; there was a leak in the plumbing, and the family overhead had four children and a phonograph. Henry forgot his troubles.

"You're going to ruin your hands," he said sympathetically. "Darn it; we *can* afford a cook, Anna."

She shook her head.

"Oh! And I meant to tell you the wall-paper's peeling off in the dining-room, and the most *awful* smell of fried onions keeps coming up the dumb-waiter shaft."

Henry gathered her into his arms.

"Dearest, in a year you can have a dipperful of attar of roses for every fried onion. And, by the way, I really prefer my steak slightly burned—it's more antiseptic."

He never suspected that her difficulties were imaginary and that she had invented them as soon as she saw his face.

A WEEK later, the contractor brought in still another schedule and another estimate. Henry demanded then if a contract were a contract or merely a piece of light literature. The contractor was apologetic, but wages were going up, materials were high, labor was scarce, transportation was uncertain, shipments were slow. Henry was angry and disillusioned, but he knew that belligerence would gain him nothing.

"In other words," he said, "there's something the matter with everything but the Orpheum, and everybody but me. I congratulate myself. Well, when *do* I get the job finished, and what does it cost?"

"The second week in September."

"*This* September? And the bill?"

"Shaved down so close there's hardly any profit——"

"Shave it every morning; it's being done. But what's your figure?"

"Seventy-six fifty."

Henry drew on his reserve fund and had a new date painted on the sign, but at bottom he was vastly perturbed.

Also, it was disconcerting to learn that Anna was much less self-reliant than he had thought her. Almost every night she displayed some unsuspected trait of helplessness, so that he simply had to shelve his worries and baby her out of her own. He never saw that, by turning his thoughts entirely upon herself, she prevented him from wasting his energy in futile brooding.

He planned to open in mid-September, but a strike among the carpenters added a few days to the time and a few dollars to the account. The building inspector wouldn't pass the wiring, and the electricians took a holiday before they condescended to return. When the last nail was driven, the last brushful of paint applied, the final item added to the long statement, the day was the last Friday in the month, and the total bill amounted to more than nine thousand dollars.

"Anna," said Henry reflectively, "it's a lucky thing for us this world wasn't all built under modern conditions. Because, if it had been, there wouldn't be anything to it yet but the Garden of Eden and Atlantic City. Well, I wonder what's next."

"There won't be any 'next,' dear. Nothing can happen now. And aren't you glad I've made us economize? Aren't you? If I hadn't, you couldn't have paid the bills at all. Say your prayers—say, 'Bless Anna!' "

And on Saturday morning, the *Herald*

told them that a committee from the Reform League had waited on the mayor for the third time and delivered an ultimatum.

"Oh, bother!" said Anna. "There's been something in the paper every two or three days. It doesn't amount to a row of pins. Dad says so."

Henry inhaled deeply.

"Did you see who's on that committee? Mix and Aunt Mirabelle, of course, and if they've got it in for anybody special, I'm it. Bob says Mix had lined up a buyer for the Orpheum, so he's sore at me. And then a flock of old men just under par—I'd say they average about eighty-seven and a half—but they're too important to be booted out of any mayor's office. And if they should get the mayor stirred up, why, we wouldn't have the chance of a celluloid rat in a furnace. I wish the judge were where I could get at him. He'd know what's going on. Do you know when he's coming back from his vacation?"

"Not for two or three weeks yet. But I've an intuition, dear——"

"Sure! So have I. A year from now we'll be eating our golden pheasants off our gold plates with our gold teeth. But, in the mean time, you better keep your eye on the butcher's bill."

IN YEARS the mayor was no chicken, but in politics he had hardly chipped his shell. So he was still susceptible to delegations and references to his solemn oath of office. Furthermore, he had been awed by Mr. Mix's eloquence. Mr. Mix, as spokesman of the committee, had delivered a speech which was a brief *résumé* of both common and statutory law from the time of Solon up to last Wednesday's meeting of the City Council.

In addition, the mayor had been particularly impressed by Miss Starkweather. He hadn't liked the way Miss Starkweather looked at him.

As the door closed behind the last of the committee, the mayor drew a prodigious breath and for several minutes remained in deep thought. He tried to remember Mr. Mix's peroration:

"The duty of the executive branch of our government is to enforce those laws, whether made yesterday or made fifty years ago or five hundred years ago and written down in our law-books. This is our third conference with you, Mr. Mayor, in regard to one of those laws. I therefore have to inform you, in behalf of our committee and our league and our whole city—whose representatives in City Council passed that law for our common good—that you stand to-day at the parting of the ways. You must choose whether to uphold your sacred oath of office or to disregard it. And within forty-eight hours you will have made that choice, and we shall know where *our* duty lies. I thank you for your patience."

The mayor was one of those who had long been vaguely suspicious that Mr. Mix wasn't always as pious as he appeared in church. He had noted, too, that Mr. Mix's name never bobbed up in connection with an obscure cause, however worthy. He was convinced that Mr. Mix had an ulterior motive, but the worst of it was that Mr. Mix had come with support which couldn't be side-tracked.

The mayor picked up his telephone; a few minutes later the chief of police strolled in and grinned at the disordered semicircle of chairs.

"Been holdin' a prayer-meetin', Mr. Rowland?"

The mayor was biting his mustache.

"Sit down, Chief. I want some advice. Lord, I wish Barklay wasn't off on his vacation! Why, I've just had a threat from this Reform League."

"Threat? What kind of a threat?"

"You know that fool Sunday law——"

"Sure! Dead letter."

"They say it's got to be enforced."

The chief laughed boisterously.

"That's a big order."

"I know it is. The mass of the people don't want it—never did. I mean, they don't want *all* of it. Same time, this league's getting pretty strong. Know what they handed me to-day?"

"Let her come!"

The mayor snorted.

"Hinted if I didn't begin enforcement they'd appeal to the governor. Lord, I wish Barklay was here!"

The chief grinned again.

"I know what Barklay'd say."

"What?"

"Give 'em rope."

"We-ll—that's easy enough to say."

"Easy to do, too."

"I can't see it. But if they go up to the governor or start impeachment proceedings——"

The chief spat contemptuously.

"Shucks! Give 'em rope."

"Well—*how*?"

"Why, enforce the law—just once. Spike Mix's guns—he's only doin' this on a bluff. Guess he wants the reform vote for Council, or somethin'. Keep it under our bonnets, and send out a squad of patrolmen Sunday afternoon to raid every picture-theatre in town. Then listen to the public."

The mayor had broken into a high-pitched laugh; he stopped abruptly.

"How many people'd there be in all the houses put together?"

"Six thousand."

"They'd start a riot."

"Well, you'd find out if the people want that law or not. *We* say they don't, but how do *we* know? Let's find out."

The mayor sat down at his desk and began to chuckle.

"Chief, that's a bully idea! But what'd happen on Monday?"

"*Happen?* When five, six thousand voters got put out in the street and their Sunday afternoon spoiled?"

"It's passing the buck," murmured the mayor ecstatically. "It's passing the buck right to the people, by George!"

"Sure! Do we go ahead with it? Want anybody tipped off?"

The mayor was hugging his knees.

"No; we'll make a clean sweep. No favorites. The bigger haul the better. All the boys'll understand. Keep it dead under your hat. We'll talk over the details to-morrow." Chuckling, he leaned back and opened his arms wide, his fists closed. "Rope?" he said. "Rope? Chief, we'll give 'em a hawser!"

ON SATURDAY night, Henry gave a special invitation performance, to which only his personal friends and Anna's were bidden, and if he had cherished any lingering doubt of his place in society, it must have been then and there removed. Naturally, since the auditorium was filled with young people who had grown up together, and with a few older people who had helped to bring them up, there was plenty of imformality—indeed, it had been scheduled and rehearsed in advance. They didn't know the details of Mr. Starkweather's trust fund, but they knew that Henry's future was in some way lashed to his success with the Orpheum, and they came to help tie the knot.

With Anna beside him, Henry had stood in the foyer to receive his guests, and as he heard the steady stream of good wishes, he began to grow curiously warm, and curiously weak in the knees. Anna moved closer to him.

"I told you so," she whispered. "I told you so. Everybody loves you."

"It isn't me," he whispered back, with ungrammatical fervor. "It's you."

They stood together, then, at the rear of the house. Standish had ousted the three-piece orchestra and taken over the piano; two other volunteers had flanked him, and the revelry began with a favorite ditty to proclaim that, all reports to the contrary notwithstanding, Henry was style all the while, all the while.

Then suddenly there were shouts for Henry and Anna, and they were seized and dragged to the top of the center aisle. Standish swung into the "Wedding March," and through a haze of rose-leaf confetti and paper streamers, the two Devereuxs were forced down to the orchestra pit. The house was on its feet to them, and Anna was sorting confetti out of her hair when Standish climbed up on the stage and waved for silence.

"Listen, everybody! Old Hank Devereux and wife tried to save the price of a caterer last spring, and they got away with it. Hank was afraid somebody might kiss the bride. Furthermore, Anna didn't want to get any wedding-presents, because they clutter up the house so, and when most of your friends live in the same town, it's hard to get rid of the stuff you don't want. So they did us out of a party. Well, so far we've given 'em Mendelssohn and confetti. Any lady or gent who now desires to kiss the bride, please rise and come forward— Hey, there! This isn't any Sinn Fein sociable. Ceremony's postponed. And, finally, dearly beloved, we come to the subject of wedding-gifts." He turned to look down at the Devereuxs, and some of the levity went out of his voice. "We thought we'd bring you a little something for good luck, old man. It's from all of us. Hope you like it. If you don't, you can swap it for a few tons of coal— There she comes!"

It was a magnificent silver tea-service, borne down the aisle by the two men who, next to Standish, were Henry's best friends.

The applause had died away; the house was quiet, expectant. From the rear, a man's voice said:

"It isn't like your golf-championship trophy, old man—you don't have to win it three times. It's all yours!"

In the shriek of laughter which followed, Henry, with Anna in tow, fled to shelter.

"Lights!" said Henry. Abruptly the auditorium was dim. And with Anna holding tight to his fingers, he sat down in the furthest corner and trembled.

For the next two hours Standish dominated the evening. When at last it was over and the guests were filing out to the lobby, he came to Henry.

"Big time, Henry; big-time!" he said. "See? They're all with you."

Henry cleared his throat.

"You're a peach, Bob! You got it up."

"Oh, it wasn't anything." Standish's cloak of comedy had fallen away; he looked as lazy and childlike as ever. "Before I go—I had a letter to-day from one of the big movie-circuit crowd. They'll pay thirty-seven thousand five hundred for the Orpheum. I've got a certified check for a thousand to bind the bargain. Want it?"

Henry didn't even glance at it.

"Put it back in your pocket, Bob. I wouldn't sell it for ten times that—not after to-night."

His friend smiled very faintly.

"It's a good price, if you care to get out from under. Between you and me, I think it's more than the Orpheum's worth."

"Don't want it," said Henry gruffly.

"Third and last chance, Henry. Otherwise, I'll mail it back to-night. Just a few hours from now this place—right where we're standing—'ll look like a sardine-can come to life, and you'll be taking in money hand over fist——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Henry affectionately. "I've been sitting on the side-lines all my life. I'm going to run with the ball."

THROUGH the jostling, good-natured crowd which blocked the sidewalk that Sunday at two o'clock, a policeman pushed his way to the ticket-booth.

"Where's the manager?"

The ticket-seller bobbed her head backward.

"First door on the left."

The policeman found the door, knocked belligerently and stepped inside.

"You the manager? Well, there ain't goin' to be no show to-day—see?"

Henry jumped to his feet.

"What's that?"

"You heard what I said. No show. Close up your theayter an' call it a day."

Henry turned for moral support to his wife. She had already hurried to his side.

"What's all this, Mr. Officer?" she asked unsteadily.

"It's police orders."

"But, Mr. Policeman—I'm Judge Barklay's daughter. I know all about that ordinance. Nobody's ever——"

He held up his hand in warning.

"That's all right, young lady; it won't do you no good to bicker about it." He motioned to Henry. "An' you go in there an' tell your audience to get their money back an' go on home."

Henry picked up his cigarette.

"Well," he said, wearily, "there goes the old ball-game! And we've sold every seat in the house—and thrown away three hundred dollars' worth of souvenirs—and the sidewalk's full of people waiting for the second show. Knock-out Mix beats Battling Devereux in the first round." He did his best to smile, but the results were poor. "And when we held off three days just so we could start on Sunday with a grand smash!"

"Get a move one, young feller! If the show begins, you're pinched—see?"

From within there was a sudden rattle of applause. Anna gripped her husband's arm.

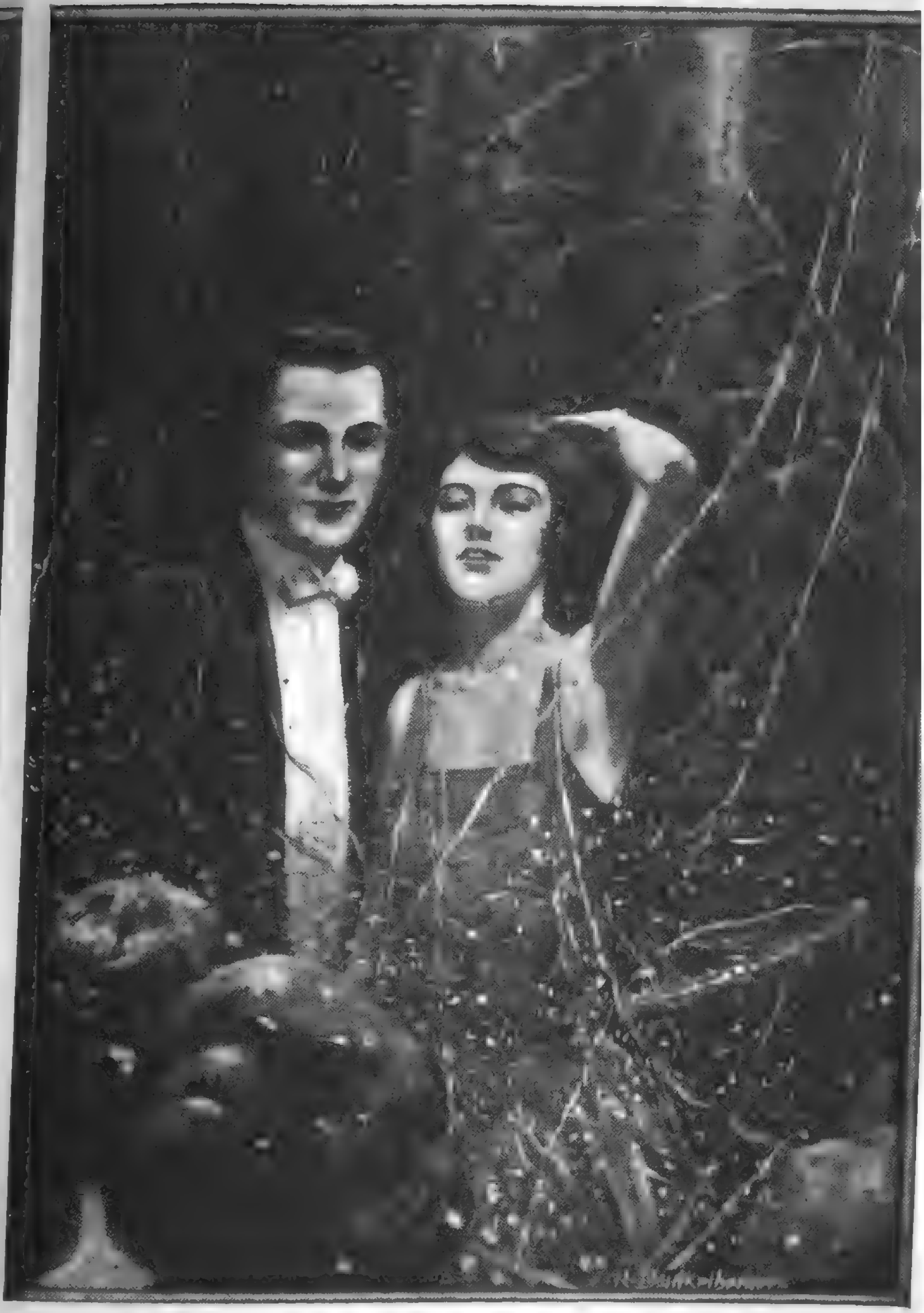
"It's—it's *begun!*" she said breathlessly.

The policeman stepped forward.

"You heard me tell you to stop it, didn't you? What are you tryin' to do—play horse with me? Now, you go in there an' stop it, and then you come along with me an' explain it to the judge. See?"

From the moment that he went out upon the little stage of his theatre until he came wearily into his own apartment at five o'clock, Henry was hardly aware of any bodily sensations at all. In the first place, he was too stunned to remember that he hated to be conspicuous. He was

Through a haze of rose-leaf confetti and paper streamers, the two Devereuxs were forced dow
her hair when Standish climbe



to the orchestra pit. The house was on its feet to them, and Anna was sorting confetti out of
on the stage and waved for silence.

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paralyzed by the contrast between last night and to-day. Consequently, he made a very good speech indeed, and the audience actually cheered him—although later, when he reviewed the incident, he had to admit that the cheers were loudest just after he had told the audience to keep the souvenirs.

Then, when in custody of the patrolman, he went out to the street, his anger and depression were still so acute that he had no leisure to be self-conscious. He realized, with a hazy sort of perception, that a tail of small boys had attached itself to the lodestar of the policeman's uniform; but even at this indignity his reaction was impersonal. He was actually too humiliated to suffer from the humiliation.

To be sure, this wasn't his first entanglement with the law, but heretofore his occasions had been marked by a different ritual. He recalled that whenever in the old days a member of the motor-cycle squad had shot past him and signaled to him to stop, the man had always treated him more or less fraternally, in recognition of the fellowship of high speed. But this was different. A Devereux—which was almost the same thing as a Starkweather—was haled along the highway like a common prisoner. And if the Devereux hadn't been engaged in that particular business—and if Aunt Mirabelle hadn't been Aunt Mirabelle—it couldn't have happened. The spiritual part of him looked down at the material part and wondered how Henry could be so white-hot and yet so calm.

During the journey he spoke only once, and that was to say bruskly to his captor, "Court isn't open to-day, is it?"

"Nope. We're goin' to a justice o' the peace."

The justice of the peace was a grizzle-haired dyspeptic who held forth in the back room of a shoemaker's shop. He had evidently been coached for the proceeding. On his desk he had a copy of the ordinance, and as soon as he had heard the charge, he delivered a lecture, which he seemed to have by heart, and fined Henry twenty-five dollars and costs. Henry paid the fine, and, turning to go, stumbled against two more policemen, each with his quarry.

"Just out of curiosity," said Henry, speaking to the world in general, "when the justice of the peace gets half the fine, isn't this court open on Sunday for godless profit, too?" And in the same enduring haze he paid an additional twenty dollars for contempt and went out to the sidewalk.

He emerged as the focus of interest for an exuberant crowd of loiterers. A camera clicked, and the man at the shutter was one of the *Herald's* staff-photographers. A youthful reporter caught step with Henry, and asked him what he had to say for publication.

"Say for publication?" repeated Henry dully. "Why, you can say—" He walked half a block before he completed the sentence. "You can say that if I said it, you couldn't print it, anyway."

HE HAD intended to go straight home to Anna, but his steps led him to the Orpheum, where he went into his tiny private office and sat down at his desk. There were two envelopes on his blotter. He slit them mechanically, and found the bill for the souvenirs and a supplementary statement from the decorator.

He began to jot down figures on one of the envelopes. Already, by remodeling the theatre, he had lost two month's headway and spent three times too much money, and if Sunday performances were to be eliminated— The good wishes of his friends, last night, turned sour in his possession. To reach his goal he should have to contrive, somehow, to fill nearly every seat at nearly every performance for the balance of the year. Not only that, but overnight his property had seriously depreciated in value. If it had been worth thirty-seven thousand five hundred yesterday, then, with Sunday enforcement, it wasn't worth a penny more than twenty to-day. And he had thrown away in improvements almost every cent that he had borrowed against the original value. He was hardly better off now than if he had carried through his bargain with Mr. Mix.

He would have to go home to Anna and explain to her as gently as he could that the road which led to the rainbow's end was closed to traffic.

And yet—involuntarily he stiffened—and yet he'd be hanged if he acted like a whipped pup. No; his friends and Anna believed in him, and he'd be hanged if he went back and confessed anything at all. It was well enough to look facts in the face, but it was better still to keep on fighting until the gong rang. No; even if Henry himself knew that he was beaten, nobody else was going to know it, and Anna least of all.

At five o'clock he came blithely into his living-room, and as he saw Anna's expression, his own changed suddenly. He had thought to find her in tears; but she was coming to him with her usual welcome, her usual smile. By all precedent, Anna should have been enjoying hysterics, which Henry had come prepared to treat.

"Well," he said, "you'd better cancel that order for golden pheasants, old dear."

"We've got lamb chops to-night," said Anna, irrelevantly, "and fresh strawberry ice-cream."

Henry returned her stare.

"What have you been doing all the afternoon—reading Marcus Aurelius?"

"No; I tidied up the kitchen. What happened to you?"

There were two different ways of presenting the narrative, and Henry chose the second. He made it a burlesque; and all the time that he was talking, Anna continued to gaze at him almost as though he had been a stranger.

"And—aren't you even *mad?*" she demanded.

Henry laughed explosively.

"Yes; I'm mad, but I've put it on ice. They say it's darkest just before the dawn, so I'm trying to fix it so we'll be sitting on the front steps to see the sunrise."

"As a matter of fact," she confided, "I loathed the idea of our running the Orpheum on Sundays. Didn't you?"

"Naturally. Also on Thursdays, Saturdays, Mondays, Fridays, Wednesdays and Tuesdays. No; my conscience may be all corrugated like a raisin, but I'm almost glad we can't run Sundays. That is, I would be, if—" He left the sentence unfinished.

"Don't you think they'll probably change that ordinance, now, though? Don't you think people will insist on it?"

"Guesswork," said Henry. "But my guess is that we're ditched. Never mind. We'll outwit 'em somehow."

"But how?"

"Now, that question," he said reproachfully, "was mighty tactless. I don't know how. But I know I'm not going to stick my head over the ramparts for 'em to shoot at. I'm no African dodger. Maybe they'll hit me in the eye all right, but I'm not going to give 'em a good cigar for it. And, in the mean time, let's go ahead with that orgy of lamb chops."

They spent the evening in a discussion of ways and means, during which she was continually amazed by Henry's attitude. From earlier circumstances she had gathered that, when he was under fire, his impulsiveness would remain constant, and that only his jocular manner would disappear; and yet Henry, who had a pretty legitimate reason to be bristling with rancor, sat and talked away as cheerfully as though this hadn't been his doomsday. But, basically, Anna understood him. She sensed that Henry had merely adopted a pose, and that in his heart he was quite as tormented, quite as desperate as she had expected him to be.

For Henry's sake, however, she resumed the discourse in the same key which Henry had set for it. Far into the night they exchanged ideas and half-blown inspirations, but when Henry finally rose, with the remark that it was time to wind the clock and put out the cat, they had come to no conclusion except that something would certainly have to be done about it.

"One thing," he said in conclusion: "I'm mighty glad that only a few of us know what this means to me. Because, if everybody did know, and came round with a lot of consolation—I'm not dead sure I could stand it."

IN THE morning, he dreaded to open his newspaper, but when he had read through the story, he conceded that it wasn't as yellow as he had feared. No; it was rather conservative, and the photograph of him wasn't printed at all.

He had been braced to find himself singled out for publicity, and he was greatly relieved. To be sure, there was a flippant mention of his relationship to Mirabelle, but it wasn't overemphasized, and altogether he had no justification for resentment—that is, at the *Herald*, which had merely printed the news. What Henry resented was the fact.

He turned to the editorial page and found a solid column of opinion; but, to his astonishment, it made no protest of yesterday's event—on the contrary, it echoed Judge Barklay. It said that a bad law ought to be repealed, a good law ought to be preserved, and that all laws, good or bad, as long as they were written on the books, ought to be enforced. Henry was mystified, for the *Herald* had always professed to be in sympathy with the working man.

Later in the day, however, he saw the leading exhibitor in town, who winked at him.

"Clever stuff, Devereux; clever stuff! 'Course, if we fellows put up a roar, they'll say it's because we've got an ax to grind. Sure we have! But the *Herald* wants the people—the people that come to our shows—to get up and blat."

"What do you think the chances are?"

"Search me. But Mayor Rowland says if we get up a petition with enough names on it, he'll bring it up to the Council. We're puttin' up posters in the lobby."

Henry's heart jumped.

"But suppose the people don't sign?"

"Well then, we'd be out o' luck. And that reminds me, Devereux—ain't it about time for you to join the Exhibitors' Association?"

"I'm afraid not. You see you're probably going to make things as hot as you can for the league—personalities and all that, and when my aunt's president of it—why, that's how I feel about it."

"It's your own affair, of course. And about the big noise—why, I guess all we can do is wait and see what happens."

Miss Starkweather, who met him on the street that morning, told him the same thing.

"Some people," she remarked altitudinously, "are always getting their toes stepped on, aren't they? Well, there's another way to look at it—the toes oughtn't to have been there."

"Oh, give us time," said Henry pleasantly. "Even the worm turns, you know."

"Humph," said Aunt Mirabelle. "Let a dozen worms do a dozen turns! I never thought I'd see the day when a Devereux—almost the same thing as a Starkweather—'d figure in a disgrace such as yours. But some day you'll see the writing on the wall."

"I'll watch for it," he said.

"Well, you better. All I've got to say is this: You just wait and see what happens."

Accordingly, Henry waited, and he saw. And to his dismay, nothing happened at all.

The petition caught hardly five hundred names, and two thirds of them were Mr. A. Mutt, Mr. O. Howe Wise, Mr. O. U. Kid and similar patronymics inscribed by small boys. The blue-law was universally unpopular, and no doubt of it, but the citizenry hesitated to attack it. Why, if a man admitted that he was in favor of Sunday tolerance, his friends—who, of course, were going through exactly the same mental rapids—might put him down in the same class with those who still mourned for saloons. Besides, there was a large amusement park just beyond the city line.

The Exhibitors' Association put up its fists to the mayor, and the mayor proposed a public hearing. At this juncture the Reform League sent a *questionnaire* to each councillor and to each member of the association. The phraseology was Socratic—it was the product of Mr. Mix's genius—and it reminded the mayor of the man who claimed that in a debate he would answer every question of his adversary with a simple "Yes" or "No." Then the first question was: "Have you stopped beating your wife?"

The exhibitors held a session behind closed doors and gave out the statement that nothing was to be gained by a public hearing. But they launched a flank attack on the Council, only to discover that the Council was wide-awake and knew that its bread was buttered on one side only.

"We are listening," said the president of Council, "for the voice of the people, and so far we haven't heard a peep. It looks as if they don't want you fellows to run Sundays, don't it?"

The spokesman of the exhibitors cleared his throat.

"Statistics prove that every Sunday an average of six thousand people——"

"That's all right. We've seen your petition. And Mr. Mutt and Mr. Kid and most of the rest of your clientele don't seem to be registered voters. How about it?"

The Council burst into a loud laugh, and the spokesman retreated in discomfiture.

BY THE time Judge Barklay returned from his vacation, the subject had even slipped away from the front page of the newspapers. The flurry was over. And out of a population of fifty thousand, ninety-nine per cent. of whom were normal-minded citizens, that tiny fraction which composed the Ethical Reform League had stowed its propaganda down the throats of the overwhelming majority.

The judge shrugged his shoulders.

"Organization," he said. "They've got a leader and speaker and a publicity bureau. That's all. I hear they're going to use it to boom Mix for a political job. But you wait—wait, and keep on paying out the rope."

"That's all I've got left to pay out," said Henry amiably.

"Aren't you doing pretty well, considering?"

Henry nodded.

"We're doing great business—I mean, anybody else would think so. About a hundred and fifty a week net—and Anna's salting away a hundred and ten of it."

"Hm. A hundred and fifty. That's good money, Henry."

"Well, that's the only kind we take. But we ought to be averaging two twenty-five. And we'd have done it, too."

The judge appeared contrite.

"I'm afraid you're blaming me for bad advice, Henry."

"No, sir. You see, even if I fall down on the first prize, I've got a pretty good business under way. Eight thousand a year."

"Would you keep on with it?"

"Oh, I suppose I'd try to sell it if I could get a price for it. But——"

"Still, of course, you want the big prize if you can get it. Notice what Mix is giving out to the papers? He'll hang himself yet. That's a prophecy. But, by George, I can't help feeling that Mix isn't in that outfit for his health."

THE Reform League had jubilantly explained to Mr. Mix that he was a savior of humanity from itself, and Mr. Mix had deftly caught whatever bouquets were thrown across the infield to him. Mr. Mix's salary was comforting; his expense-accounts were paid promptly; he was advancing in Miss Starkweather's good books, and he considered himself to be a very clever man indeed.

At the very least, he was clever enough to realize that his position was now strategically favorable, and that as long as he moved neither forward nor backward, he was in no danger from any source. He was saving enough out of his salary—and his expense-accounts—to reduce his indebtedness. In a year, he could snap his fingers at the world. And by the end of the year he could also select a future to fit the circumstances.

For the time being, however, it seemed advisable to Mr. Mix to make haste slowly. The failure of the public to rise up and flay the league had lifted him into a position of much prominence and conveyed the impression that he was individually powerful.

Mr. Mix had committed himself to the preparation of an amendment to the ordinance, which should be even more cerulean than the original, but he knew that, if he pressed it, it would probably topple back and crush him. The people had been pushed about as far as they would go. And therefore Mr. Mix, who had now made himself solid with the reactionaries, and who had actually succeeded in being mentioned as a man who would make a good mayor or president of Council, followed out a path which, unless his geography of common sense were wrong, could hardly end in a precipice.

He became, overnight, a terror to the youths who rolled dice in the city parks and on the sidewalks in the business district. He headed a violent onslaught upon the tobacconists who sold cigarettes to minors. He made a great stir about the sanitary code and the pure-food regulations. And all this, which was simply a phase of good government, was lumped by Mr. Mix under the general heading of "reform," and Mr. Mix and the league took credit for it.

By such diagonal methods, Mr. Mix contrived to hold himself up to the public as a live reformer, but in no sense a radical, and to the league as a radical but not a rusher-in where angels fear to tread. It required the equilibrium of a tight-rope walker, but Mr. Mix had it. He was aware, of course, that a reform candidate is always politically anemic, but he was hoping that, by the injection of this good-government virus, he might be strong enough to catch a regular nomination to boot, and to run on a fusion ticket. From present indications, it wasn't impossible.

Mirabelle said, with a rolling-up of her mental shirt-sleeves:

"Well, now let's get after something drastic. I've heard lots of people say you ought to get elected to office. Well, show 'em what you can do. Of course, what we've been doing is all right, but it's kind of small potatoes."

Mr. Mix looked executive.

"We mustn't go too fast, Miss Starkweather. We mustn't make the public too—nervous."

"Humph. People that don't feel guilty don't feel nervous. I say it's about time to launch something drastic. Next thing for us to do is to make the league a state-wide organization. Maybe we'd better run over to the capital and talk to the governor."

MR. MIX was opposed, but he couldn't withstand her. He had a number of arguments, but she talked them into jelly, and eventually dragged him to an interview with the governor. When it was over, she beamed victoriously.

"There! Didn't I tell you so? He's with us."

Mr. Mix repressed a smile.

"Yes; he said if we draft a bill for a state law and get it introduced and passed, he'll sign it."

"Well, what more could he say?"

He wanted to ask, in turn, what less could be said, but he contained himself.

"You know," he warned her, "as soon as we put out any propaganda that's really revolutionary, we're going to lose some of our new members. There's a certain amount of conservatism in our own ranks."

"Good! Weed out the dead wood."

"That's all right, but after what we've done so far, people are looking at us as a—a switch to chastise the city. But we don't want them to look at us as a shillalah. And this state law you've got in mind hits too many people."

"Let it hit 'em!"

"Well, anyway," he pleaded, "we ought to take six months, or perhaps a year, and work up to it gradually. And we ought to pass a model ordinance here first, before we talk about passing statutes. I'd suggest a series of educational pamphlets for a start. I'll write them myself."

She was impatient, but she finally yielded.

"Well, go ahead and do it."

"I will. I will have the whole series done by spring."

"Not till then?" she protested vigorously.

Mr. Mix feared not.

"Perfect the organization first, and begin to fight when we've accumulated all our ammunition. So far, all we've had is a battle, but now we're planning a war. I want to be prepared in every detail before we fire a single more shot."

She regarded him admiringly.

"Sounds reasonable at that. You do it your own way."

He was feeling the glow of power, and yet he had his moments of uncertainty, did Mr. Mix, for he sometimes found it difficult to be a hypocrite on both sides of the same proposition. And there were moments when he wished that Henry were more belligerent or that Mirabelle were less familiar. He knew that he was personally responsible for the present enforcement; he believed that, because of it, Henry Devereux didn't have a Chinaman's chance; he knew that if Mirabelle got her legacy, she would have Mr. Mix to thank for it. But Henry was too cheerful and Mirabelle was too coy, and the two facts didn't coordinate.

Certainly there was no finesse in hailing Mirabelle as an heiress until Henry's failure was more definitely placarded. To be sure, she had plenty of money now, and she was spending it like water, but he knew that it included the income from the Starkweather estate. She probably had—oh, a hundred thousand or more of her own. And that wasn't enough. Yes; it was time for Mr. Mix to think ahead. He had identified himself so thoroughly with the league that he couldn't withdraw—and Mirabelle still held his note. Of course, if the league could furnish him with a stepping-stone to the mayoralty or the presidency of Council, Mr. Mix didn't care to withdraw from it anyway.

There was something else. Suppose Mirabelle got her legacy and Mr. Mix volunteered to share it with her. He was confident that she would consent; her symptoms were already on the surface. But how, in such event, could Mr. Mix regulate the habits which were so precious to him? How could he hide his fondness for his cigar and his nightcap, his predilection for burlesque shows and boxing-bouts and blond stenographers?

Still, all that could be arranged. For twenty years he had gone to New York regularly on business; it was simply necessary to discover what "business" could summon him if he were married, independent and a professional reformer. And Mr. Mix, always a few lengths ahead of the calendar, procured the addresses of a metropolitan anti-cigarette conference and a watch-and-ward society and applied for membership. An alibi is exactly the opposite of an egg—the older it is the better.

WHEN Henry told his wife that he was counting on her for brilliant ideas, he meant the compliment rather broadly; for he couldn't imagine how Anna could supply any practical schemes for increasing the patronage of a motion-picture theatre. Indeed, when she brought him her first suggestion, he laughed and petted her, and told her that he was ever so much obliged, but her plan wouldn't work."

"You see," he said, "you haven't had very much experience in this business——"

"Methuselah!" she retorted, and Henry laughed again.

"That's no way for a wife to talk. When I mention business, you're supposed to look at me with ill-concealed awe. But to get down to brass tacks, I don't believe you can put over any grand-opera stuff on a movie audience. That is, not in a town this size. And even suppose it would work, I still don't like it. You don't make friends simply to use 'em."

'Why, of course not. But after you've made 'em, you're silly not to let 'em help you if they can—and if they want to. And if they don't, then they aren't really your friends. It's a good way to find out."

Henry frowned a little.

"What makes you think it would work?"

"Human nature. Now, you just think it over. All our friends come to the Orpheum some night, don't they? They come for two reasons—one's because it's a nice house now, and the other's because it's ours. And sometimes they get good seats, and sometimes they don't. Well, we aren't asking any favor of them; we're just making sure that if they all come the same night, they'll have the same seats time after time. And they'll like it, Henry."

"But to be brutally frank, I still don't see where we get off any better."

"You wait! So we sell for just one particular performance—say the quarter-to-nine one, one night a week—season tickets. And that night we'd have special music, and——"

"I *still* don't see——"

"Why, you silly! It'll be 'society night!' And I don't care whether it's movies or the Metropolitan Opera House, if you make a thing fashionable, then it gets everybody—the fashionable ones, and then the ones who want to be fashionable, and finally the ones who know they haven't a ghost of a chance and just want to go and look at the others."

Henry labored with his thoughts.

"Well, I *still* don't't——"

"Why, Henry darling! Because we'd make it Friday night—that's our worst night in the whole week ordinarily—and have all reserved seats that night, and then, of course, we'd raise the prices!"

"Oh!" said Henry. "Now I get it. I thought it was just swank."

"And if you once get people thinking there's something exclusive about a shop or a hotel or a club or even a theatre, they'll pay any amount to get in. And our friends don't care when they come, and they'll love all sitting together in the boxes, or even in the orchestra."

He left the mechanics of it to Anna, who merely conferred with Bob Standish and then with one of her girl friends, and sent out a circular among the elect. But even Anna was amazed by the prompt response. It resulted in turning the worst night of the week into the best.

"That boosts us up another fifty a week," said Henry appreciatively. "And we must have a thousand in the bank, haven't we? Say, Anna; this bread-and-cheese racket is all right when you can't afford anything else, but, honestly, won't you just hire a cook?"

"Not yet, dear. We aren't nearly out of the woods. Society night's helped a lot; but we aren't averaging over two hundred yet, are we? So if we don't think up some more schemes, why, what we've saving now'll have to be our capital next year."

"But when a man has this much income——"

"Yes; and you owe ten thousand on a mortgage, and the tax bills haven't come in yet. We'll save a while longer."

It was in December that she conceived the "bargain matinée," which wasn't the ordinary cut-price performance but an adaptation of an old trick of the department stores. The Tuesday and Friday matinées were the poorest-attended; so Anna suggested—and Henry ordered—that beginning at half-past four on Tuesdays and Fridays, the fifty-cent seats were reduced at the rate of a cent a minute. In other words, the Orpheum challenged the public to buy its entertainment by the clock. A person who came a quarter of an hour late was admitted for thirty-five cents, and the bargain-hunter who could find a vacant seat at twenty minutes past five could see the last two reels for nothing. It didn't bring in a tremendous revenue, but it caught the popular fancy, and it was worth another twenty dollars a week.

And Anna discovered, too, that the unfinished second story of the theatre had possibilities. She had it plastered and gaily papered; she put up a frieze of Noah's-ark animals; she bought toys and games and a sand-box—and for a nominal fee a mother could leave her angel child in charge of a kindergarten assistant and watch the feature film without ill conscience. There was no profit in it, as a department, but it was good advertising and helped the cause.

In the mean time, Henry, who, at this season, would ordinarily have gone to Pinehurst for winter golf, was watching the rise and fall of the box-office receipts as eagerly as he would have watched the give-and-take of match-play in tournament finals. To Henry, the Orpheum had long ceased to be a kitchen. He had forgotten that a few months ago his soul had been corrugated with goose-flesh at the prospect of this probation. Since August he had done more actual work than in all his previous life, and the return from it was approximately what his allowance had been from Mr. Starkweather, but Henry had caught the spark of personal ambition, and he wouldn't stop running until the gas gave out.

Mr. Mix said to him sorrowfully at the Citizens Club,

"One of the prime regrets of my life, Henry, is that you—the nephew of my old friend—should have suffered—should have been in a position to suffer—from the promotion of civic integrity."

Henry laughed unaffectedly.

"Yes," he said; "it must have raised perfect Cain with you."

"I don't like your tone, Henry. You're not doubting my sincerity, are you?"

"*Doubt* it? I should say not! Tell me something: What's all this I hear about you and Aunt Mirabelle going buggy-riding last Sunday?"

Mr. Mix grew red.

"Buggy-riding! Miss Starkweather was kind enough to take me out to the lake in her car."

"That's buggy-riding," said Henry affably. "'Buggy-riding' 's a generic term."

Mr. Mix fought down his anger.

"You're very much of a joker, Henry. "Well, I hope business is satisfactory."

"Great!" said Henry. "Come in next week and see how we're turning 'em away. I've got a new pianist. He looks like a Sealyham terrier, but he's got a repertoire like a catalogue of phonograph-records. I dare the audience to name anything he can't play right off the bat—songs, opera, Gregorian chants, sonatas, jazz—and if he can't play it, the person that asked for it gets a free ticket."

"So—to use a colloquialism—you're going very strong?"

"To use another colloquialism," said Henry, "we fairly reek with prosperity, and we're going to double our business. That is, unless you leaguers stop all forms of amusement but tit-tat-toe and puss-in-the-corner."

"One expects to be rallied for one's convictions." Mr. Mix smiled feebly.

Henry nodded engagingly.

"I certainly got rallied enough for mine. That justice of the peace rallied me for twenty-five to start with, and followed it up with a rally for twenty more. But if you want my opinion, Mr. Mix, you'll lay off trying to promote civic integrity with a meat-ax. All you've done so far is to take a lot of money away from the picture-houses and give it to the trolley company and the White City—white when it was painted."

Mr. Mix waved his hand indulgently.

"You come to a meeting of the league sometime, Henry, and we'll give you a chance to air your views."

He reported the interview to Anna, and she seemed to find in it the material for reflection. She asked Henry if he thought that Mr. Mix was deliberately making up to Mirabelle. Henry reflected also.

IN JANUARY, Henry had an interview with Mr. Archer, who praised him for his accomplishment.

"But it only goes to show how the best intentions in the world can get all twisted up," said Mr. Archer gravely. "Here you've done what you were supposed to do—you've done it better than you were supposed to do it—and then, because of something that neither your uncle nor I ever dreamed of, you're liable to get punished just as badly as if you'd made a complete failure. It's a downright shame!"

"We're packing 'em in pretty well," said Henry. "I figured that if we sold out at every performance, the gross would be about fourteen hundred a week. We're actually taking in about eight fifty. That's a local record, but it isn't good enough."

"No; you seem to be short about—three thousand dollars to date. You've got to make that up and reach a still higher average for the next seven months, and I'm blessed if I can see how you're going to do it. One thing, Henry: I wish your uncle could know how you're taking it."

Henry was reminiscent.

"When Uncle John went to a ball-game, he always liked to see a man run like fury on a fly ball. Forty-nine times out of fifty an outfielder'd catch it—but the other time he'd drop it, and the batter'd take two bases. But if he'd loafed to first, he'd get only one. Well, that's all I'm doing now—playing the percentage. And I don't gloom so very much—only fifteen minutes a day in my own room. I got the habit when I was taking a correspondence course on efficiency."

Mr. Archer smiled and nodded.

"Your year won't have been wasted, Henry. And when it's over, if you want to get out of the picture business, you can get a dozen first-rate jobs from men who wouldn't have taken you in as an office-boy a season ago. Give my love to your wife, Henry, and tell her for me that I'm proud of you."

On his way out, he dropped in for a moment to see Bob Standish. Bob was at his old tricks again; and while his competitors in realty and insurance and mortgage-loans made the same mistake that once his classmates and instructors had made, he had proceeded to chase several of those competitors out of business and to purchase their good-will on his own terms. It was popularly said in his own circle that Standish would clear a hundred thousand dollars his first year.

He winked lazily at Henry and indicated a chair.

"Glad you came in. Two things to ask you. One—want to sell? Two—want to rent?"

"If you were in my shoes, would you sell, Bob?"

"I can get you twenty-eight thousand."

"That's lower than the last one."

"Sure; but everybody knows you've got a clientele that nobody else could get. Are you talking?"

"I? Not just yet."

"Want to rent? I just had a nibble for small space; you could get a hundred and fifty a month for your second floor."

"I—hardly think so, Bob. That's a pet scheme of Anna's, and, besides, it's good advertising."

His friend's eyes were round and childlike.

"Made any plans for the future, Henry? Know what you'll do if you stub your toe and don't get your quota?"

"Sell the Orpheum and strike you for a job, I guess."

"Don't believe it would work, old man."

Henry looked serious.

"I'm sorry you think so."

"No; I'm afraid I couldn't give you a job, old dear. But maybe we'll do business together some other way."

AS HE drove his runabout homeward, Henry was downcast. He didn't blame Standish—Standish had showed himself over and over again to be Henry's best friend on earth. But he was sorry that Standish hadn't thrown in that last remark about doing business together some other way. That wasn't like Bob, and it hurt. It was too infernally commercial.

He found the apartment deserted. His shout of welcome wasn't answered; his whistle met with silence. Henry hung up his hat with considerable pique and lounged into the living-room. What excuse had Anna to be missing at the hour of his return? Didn't she know that the happiest moment of his day was when she came flying into his arms as he crossed the threshold?

But just then the key turned in the lock. He greeted her tenderly, but temperately.

"Well, where've you been?"

She had to catch her breath.

"Oh, my dear, I've had the most wonderful time! I've—oh, it's been perfectly gorgeous! And I've got it! I've *got* it!"

Everybody's Magazine, September, 1922

He had never seen her keyed to such a pitch.

"Got what? St. Vitus's dance?"

"*No!* The scheme! The scheme we were looking for! Just wait till I can breathe. Do you remember what you told me a long time ago about a talk you had with your aunt? And she said you'd see the writing on the wall?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've seen it!"

"Whereabouts?"

"Wait! And remember when Mr. Mix said you ought to go to a league meeting sometime?"

"Yes."

"Well, I went!"

He gazed at her, dumfounded.

"You what?"

She nodded repeatedly.

"I was going past Masonic Hall and I saw a sign. So I went in. Oh, it was so funny! The man at the door said to me in a sort of undertaker's voice, 'Are you one of us?' And I said I wasn't, but I was thinking about it, and he said something about the ninety and nine and gave me a blank to fill out—only, I didn't do it. I used it for something lots better—I'll show you in a minute. And then I sat down, and pretty soon Mr. Mix got up to talk—and you should have heard him brag about what the league was doing—only, the man next to me said it was politics instead of reform—and then he went on to talk about that ordinance and what it really meant—and the more he talked the more I kept thinking. My dear, all that ordinance says—at least, all they claim it says—is that we can't keep open on Sunday for profit, isn't it?"

Henry was a trifle dizzy, but he retained his perspective.

"Yes; but who'd want to keep open for charity?"

She gave a little cry of exultation.

"But that's *exactly* what we want to do! That's what we're *going* to do! And they can't prevent us, either. We're going to keep open for a high, noble purpose and not charge a cent! So I wrote it all down on the back of that blank the man gave me—and there it is—and I think it's perfectly gorgeous—even if it is mine."

On the back of the blank was written what was evidently intended as the copy for an advertisement. She watched Henry as he read it, and when at first she could detect no change in his expression, her eyes widened. Then Henry, half-way down the page, began to grin, and his grin spread and spread until his whole face was alight with joy. He came to the last line, gasped, looked up at Anna, and suddenly he caught her in his arms and waltzed her madly about the living-room.

When he released her, her hat was set at a new and rakish angle and she had lost too many hairpins, but to Henry she had never looked half so adorable.

"Of course," he panted, "everybody else'll do it, too, as soon as we've showed 'em how——"

"Wh—what difference does that make?"

"That's right, too." He fairly doubled himself with mirth. "Can't you just see Mix's face when he sees *this* writing on the wall—of the Orpheum?"

"I—I've been seeing it all afternoon. When can we start?"

"Right away. Now!" He stopped, rigid. "No; we won't, either. No; we won't. First, we've got to see the judge. We've got to make sure there's no flaw in it. And then—we won't let anybody copy us!"

"But how can you stop them?"

Henry was electric.

"We'll stop 'em all right—don't worry about that. All it needs is a few thousand dollars, and we've got the cash in the bank this minute. We've—" He paused again and looked down at her, and his voice fell a semitone. "I don't know where I get all this 'we' stuff. I'd have spent two-thirds of it by this time. You're the one that's saved it—and earned it, too, by gosh!" He lifted her hands, and while she watched him with shining eyes, he deliberately kissed the tip of each of her ten fingers. "That's where the money's come from!" said Henry, clearing his throat. "Out of dish-water. Only, to-night we're going out to a restaurant and eat ourselves logy, and you won't wash a darned dish! It's my party—and—oh, you want to know what the scheme is? Well, listen——"

MISS MIRABELLE STARKWEATHER lifted her cup of tea and drank to Mr. Mix's good health. Mr. Mix, sitting upright in a gilded chair, bowed with a courtliness which belonged to the same historical period as the chair and also drank.

Over the rim of his cup his eyes met Mirabelle's.

"Seems to me you've got on some kind of a new costume, haven't you?" asked Mr. Mix gallantly. "Looks very festive to me—very."

For the first time since bustles went out of fashion, Miss Starkweather blushed. It wasn't that she had a grain of romance in her, but that she was confused to be caught in the act of flagging a beau. To hide her confusion, she rose and went over to the furthest window and flung it wide open. The month was February and the air was chill and raw, but Mirabelle could think of no other pretext for turning her back and cooling her cheeks. And yet, although she would have perjured herself a thousand times before she would admit it, she felt a certain strange, springlike pleasure to know that Mr. Mix was only pretending to be deceived.

"Oh, my, no!" she said over her shoulder. "I've had this since the Flood."

Mr. Mix had also risen, to hand her back to her seat, and now he stood looking down at her. She was wearing a gown of rustling plum-colored taffeta, with cut-steel buttons; and at her belt there was a Dutch-silver châtelaine which had been ultrasmart when she had last worn it. Vaguely, she supposed that it was ultrasmart today, and that was the reason she had attached it to her. From the châtelaine depended a silver pencil, a gold watch, a vinaigrette with gold-enameled top and a silver-mesh purse. Mr. Mix, finishing the inventory, seated himself and began to tap one foot on the floor reflectively. He was a man of perception, and he knew war-paint when he saw it.

"Makes you look so much younger," said Mr. Mix, and sighed a little.

"Don't be a fool!" said Miss Starkweather, and to dissemble her pleasure she put an extra-sharp edge on her voice. "I don't wear clothes to make me look younger; I wear 'em to cover me up."

"That's more than I can say for the present generation."

"Ugh!" said Miss Starkweather. "Shameless little trollops! But the worst comment you could make about this present day is that men like it. They *marry* those girls. Beyond *me!*"

Mr. Mix sneezed unexpectedly. There was a cold draft on the back of his neck, but as Mirabelle said nothing about closing the window, he hesitated to ask permission.

"I've always wondered what effect it would have had on your—public career—if you hadn't preferred to remain single."

"My opinions aren't annuals, Mr. Mix. They're hardy perennials."

"I know. But do you think a married woman ought to devote herself entirely to public affairs? Shouldn't she consider marriage almost a profession in itself?"

"Well, I don't know about that. Duty's duty."

"Oh, to be sure. But would marriage have interfered with your career? Or is marriage really the higher duty of the two?"

"There's something in that, Mr. Mix. I never did believe a married woman ought to be in the road all the time."

"It was a question of your career, then?"

Mirabelle put down her cup.

"Humph. No; it wasn't. Right man never asked me."

Mr. Mix's mind was on tiptoe.

"But your standards are so lofty—naturally they would be." He paused. "I wondered what your standard really is."

Mirabelle sat primly erect, but her voice had an unusual overtone.

"Oh, I'm not exactly a ninny. But good husbands don't grow on gooseberry bushes. If I'd ever found a man that had the right principles—a good, solid, earnest citizen I could be proud of——"

Mr. Mix interpolated a wary comment.

"You didn't mention money."

"Do I look like the kind of a woman that would marry for money?"

"And in all these—I mean to say, haven't you ever met a man who complied with these conditions?"

She made no intelligible response, but as Mr. Mix watched her, he was aware that his next sentence would define his future.

HE WAS convinced that Henry was due to fall short of his quota by two or three thousand dollars; nothing but a miracle could save him, and Mr. Mix was a skeptic in regard to miracles. He was positive that in a brief six months Miss Satrkweather would receive at least a half million. He believed—and his belief was cousin to a prayer—that Mirabelle had become absorbed in reform only because no one had become absorbed in Mirabelle. He was threatened with vertigo, but he mastered himself and bade farewell to his bachelorhood.

"You have heartened me more than you know," said Mr. Mix, with ecclesiastical soberness. "Because it has been my poverty which has kept me silent." He bent forward. "Mirabelle, am I the right man?"

Almost by sheer will-power he rose and came to her and took her hand. She shrank away, but her fingers remained quiescent. Mr. Mix sneezed again and stooped down, but Mirabelle avoided him.

"No," she said, with a short laugh. "That don't signify—I don't approve of it much." She wavered and relented. "Still, I guess it's customary—Theodore."

BEFORE he left her they had staged their first altercation—it could hardly be called a quarrel, because it was too one-sided. Mirabelle had asked him to telephone the glad tidings to the *Herald*, and of a sudden Mr. Mix was afflicted with self-consciousness. Unfortunately he couldn't give a valid reason for it—he couldn't tell her that illogically but instinctively he wanted to keep the matter as a locked secret—and especially to keep it locked from Henry Devereux—until the minister had said, "Amen."

"Humph," said Mirabelle. "*I*'m not ashamed of being congratulated. Are you? But if you're so finicky about it, I'll do the telephoning myself."

Whereupon Mr. Mix went back to his room and drank two high-balls and communed with himself until long past midnight.

In the morning he turned to the society column of the *Herald*, and when he saw the flattering paragraph in type—with the veiled hint that he might be the next candidate for mayor on a reform ticket—he sat very still for a moment or two while his hand shook slightly. No backward step now! His head was in the noose. He wondered, with a fresh burst of self-effacement, what people would say about it. And yet what difference did it make? Why should he concern himself with all the petty gossip of a town which wasn't even progressive enough to have an art-museum or a flying-field, to say nothing of a good fight club? But, just the same, he wished that Mirabelle had been willing to keep the engagement a secret. Mr. Mix was sure to encounter Henry at the Citizens Club, and he didn't like to visualize Henry's smile.

He was in the act of tossing away the paper when his attention was snatched back by a half-page advertisement in which the name of the Orpheum Theatre stood out like a red flag. Mr. Mix glanced at it superciliously, but a moment later his whole soul was strung on it.

It announced that every Sunday afternoon and evening, entertainment consisting of high-class motion-pictures with sacred music would be given at the Orpheum. This was absolutely free to every one who presented at the door ticket-stubs of the previous week's performance, bargain matinées excepted, showing a total expenditure of two dollars. For the next Sunday, "The Sword-maker's Son," an absorbing drama of Bibical days was announced, and, for the following one, "Ben Hur," in seven reels. A voluntary collection would be taken up at these performances and divided between the starving children of Russia and the Chinese Famine Fund.

Mr. Mix, goggle-eyed, jumped for the telephone, rattled the hook impetuously and called Mirabelle's number.

"Mirabelle. . . . Good-morning. Have you— . . . No; I'm not cross with you, but— . . . Oh! Good-morning, *dear*. . . . This is important. Have you seen the Orpheum's ad in the *Herald?* Isn't that the most barefaced evasion of a law you've ever *seen?* Don't we want to rush in and——"

She interrupted him.

"Why, no; not when it's for charity, do we?"

Mr. Mix nearly dropped the receiver.

"Charity! Charity your grandmother! It's a cheap trick to attract people during the week, so they'll have a show on Sunday in spite of the law."

"Oh, I don't doubt there's some catch in it. That's Henry all over. But if the league went out and interfered with an educational program with a collection for charity, we'd——"

"Yes; but, my dear woman, would we sanction a dance for charity? A poker-party? A wine-supper? We——"

"But there won't be any dancing or

drinking or card-playing at the Orpheum, will there?"

He lost his temper.

"What's the matter with you? Can't you *see*——"

"No; but I can hear pretty well," said Mirabelle. "I'm not deaf. And seems to me"— she sniffled—"seems to me you're making an awful funny start of things, Theodore."

"My dear girl it's simply to evade the law, and——"

"But, Theodore, if we lift one finger to stop the raising of money for the poor starving children in foreign countries, we'd lose every scrap of influence we've gained."

"But this means that all the theatres can open again!"

"Well, if all they do is show pictures like "Ben Hur," "The Sword-maker's Son," *we* can't say anything. We can't be *too* narrow. Maybe you'd better get to work and frame that amendment to the ordinance we've been talking about. Then, if they show any other kind of films, we *can* stop it. When are you coming to see me? I've been awfully lonesome—since yesterday."

Mr. Mix hung up and sat staring into vacancy. Out of the wild tumult of his thoughts there rose one pitcure, clear and distinct—the picture of his five-thousand-dollar note. Whatever else happened, he couldn't financially afford, now or in the immediate future, to break with Mirabelle. She would impale him with bankruptcy as ruthlessly as she would swat a fly. He wished that he had put off until to-morrow what he had done, with such conscious foresight, only yesterday.

NOW, although Mr. Mix had shaken with consternation when he saw the advertisement of the Orpheum, Henry shook with a different sentiment when he saw the announcement in regard to Mr. Mix. It was clear in his mind now that Mr. Mix wasn't the sort of man to marry on speculation. Henry guessed that Mirabelle had confided to him the terms of the trust agreement, and that Mr. Mix had decided that Henry was out of the running and that Mirabelle had a walkover. The guess itself was wrong, but the deduction from it was correct; and instead of damning Mr. Mix for a conscienceless scoundrel, Henry put back his head and laughed until the tears came.

He hurried to show the paragraph to Anna, but Anna wouldn't smile. She was a woman, and therefore she compressed her lips sorrowfully and said, "Oh, poor Miss Starkweather!" To which Henry responded with a much more vigorous compression of his own lips and the apt correction: "Oh, no. Poor Mr. Mix!"

Before he went to the theatre that morning, he carried his congratulations to his aunt in person. She received them characteristically.

"Humph. Pretty flowery language! Well, you don't need to send me any present, Henry. I didn't send *you* one."

"When's the happy event to be?" he inquired politely.

"June—fourth of June."

"And do you know where you're going for your honeymoon?"

"I don't like that word," said Mirabelle. "It sounds mushier than a corn-starch pudding. And, besides, it's nobody's business but his and mine, and I haven't even told him yet. I'm keeping it for a surprise."

"Oh!" said Henry. "That's rather a novel idea, isn't it?"

"Humph," said Mirabelle dryly. "The whole thing's novel, isn't it? But I'm obliged for your coming up here, Henry. I didn't suppose you had enough interest in family matters to be so nosy, even."

As Henry went out, he encountered Mr. Mix coming in, and repeated his congratulations so emphatically that Mr. Mix began to stammer.

"I appreciate all you say, Henry—but—come here a minute." He drew Henry into the vestibule. "I'm sort of afraid, from the way you act, there's something in the back of your mind. I've thought, sometimes, you must have lost sight of the big, broad principles behind our work. I've been afraid you've taken some of it as if it was directed personally against you— Well, anyway, you're too big a man for that, Henry. Now, about this new scheme of yours. It's my feeling that you're dodging the law. It's my official duty to look into it. Only, if we do have to put a stop to it, I want you to realize that I sympathize with any personal loss you may have to suffer. You understand that, don't you?"

Henry nodded.

"Why, certainly. Your motives are purer than the thoughts of childhood. Let's come out in the open, then. How do you think you could put a stop to it? Because, if you could, why, I'll save you the trouble."

Mr. Mix hesitated.

"But if it's my duty to stop your show, why should I give away my plans? So you could anticipate them?"

"No; I've done that already."

"Now, Henry, that sounds too conceited to be like you."

"Oh, no; it's only a fact. But, here—I'll run through the list for you. Have me pinched under the ordinance? Can't be done. The city attorney's said so. Amend the ordinance? You haven't a chance in a million. Get an injunction? You can't do that, either, because we got one already."

Mr. Mix's jaw dropped.

"What's that? How could you——"

"Oh, I got Bob Standish—just as a citizen—to apply for an injunction yesterday, to test it out. It's being argued at eleven o'clock. Don't you want to come over and hear it? If I lose, I won't open next Sunday at all; and if I win, then the league can't get an injunction later. What else can you do?"

"We may have other cards up our sleeves," said Mr. Mix stiltedly.

"Just the place I'd have looked for 'em," said Henry, but his tone was so gentle and inoffensive that Mr. Mix only stared.

FROM his conference with Mirabelle, who merely confirmed what she had said over the telephone, Mr. Mix hastened down to the court-house, where he arrived just in time to hear the gray-haired jurist say dispassionately,

"Application denied."

Mr. Mix swabbed his face and thought in lurid adjectives. He wouldn't have dared, in view of Mirabelle's opinion, to ask for an injunction on behalf of the league; but it had occurred to him that he might arrange the matter privately. He could persuade one of the old mossbacks that Mirabelle might have been swayed by her relationship to Henry—this struck him as the height of sardonic humor—and the mossback could go into court as an individual to enjoin the Sunday performance as opposed to public policy. But Henry had outstripped him. And Standish's attorney, who, by a fiction, was attacking Henry's position, had claimed that the Sunday show was designed for profit indirectly and that the price was merely collected in advance. This would have been precisely Mr. Mix's thesis. Henry's own lawyer had replied that there was no advance in the price of tickets during the week, and that, consequently, each ticket contained the germ of an invitation. To be sure, one couldn't get the invitation without the ticket, but where was the ordinance violated? Would the court hold, for example, that a grocer couldn't invite to a lecture for charity, on Sunday, every one who had purchased a sack of flour during the previous week? Would the court hold that an author couldn't invite to a public reading, on Sunday, every one who had bought his book on Saturday?

The court wouldn't.

And Mr. Mix went home and got a pencil, and covered sheet after sheet with figures.

Presently he sat back and laughed. Why, he had had his hysterics for nothing! Henry couldn't overcome his handicap unless he jammed his house to capacity from now until August. No theatre had ever yet accomplished such a feat. And it wasn't as though Henry had a monopoly on this scheme; in another week he would have the same competition as always. The other managers would follow like a flock of ducks.

That evening, Mirabelle found him more animated than usual—and more lavish with compliments. His courage was back in his heart, and when, on Sunday afternoon, he placed himself inconspicuously in the window of an ice-cream parlor squarely opposite the Orpheum, it was merely to satisfy his inquisitiveness and not to feed his doubt.

He had to concede that Henry was clever—and that this present inspiration was really brilliant. Mr. Mix could see clearly just what Henry had devised. He had devised a rebate. From a bookkeeping standpoint, he was cutting his own prices during the week—for of course the Sunday performance was costly to him—simply to increase the gross. But did Henry imagine that his scheme was copyrighted? Mr. Mix had to smile. Across the street there were fully a hundred people waiting for the doors to open. The house would be packed solid from now until late evening. But when next Sunday came, and all the other houses stole Henry's thunder——

Mr. Mix retired in the blandest of humors, and on Monday he visited the manager of the largest picture-house in town.

"I suppose," he said, "you're going to follow the procession, aren't you?"

The manager looked at him queerly.

"Well—no. That bird, Devereux, put it all over us like a tent." He snorted with disgust. "Man from Standish's office come round here a while back and asked for a price for the house for Sundays up to August. We thought it was for some forum or something; so we leased it for the next twenty Sundays for four hundred and seventy-five beanos, cash in advance. Then it turns up that Standish's office was actin' for Devereux."

The bloom of apoplexy rose to Mr. Mix's cheeks.

"You mean he——"

"Do you know if he leased more theatres than this one? Did he?"

"*Did* he? He signed up the whole Exhibitors' Association. There's twenty-two houses in town, and he's tied up twenty-one and he owns the other. Far's I can find out, it only cost him about six thousand to get an air-tight monopoly on Sunday shows for the next six months."

Mr. Mix drew breath from the very bottom of his lungs.

"What can you—do about it?"

"Do? What *is* there to do? He's got a cinch."

Mr. Mix was occupied with mental arithmetic.

"Tell me this: Is it going to pay him?"

"Pay him?" echoed the manager scornfully. "Six thou for twenty weeks is three hundred a week. Fifty a day. Call it twelve fifty a performance. Twelve fifty, gross, calls for about twenty-five people. Don't you think he'll draw that many new patrons when he can give 'em what nobody else can? And anything over twenty-five'll be velvet. He'll make a clean-up. The only thing that'll stop him is when he can't get features with a religious kick to 'em."

Mr. Mix brightened, but only for an instant. To be sure, Henry was limited in his choice of films, but there were only twenty-five Sundays between now and August.

"I'll tell you what'll stop him," said Mr. Mix, choking down his passion. "And that's our amendment to the Sunday ordinance. And it's going to prohibit any such horse-play as this." He surveyed his man critically. "Does Henry Devereux belong to your association?"

"No, he don't. And he won't, either. Not after this!"

"Then, as long as the rest of you people can't keep open Sundays, anyway," observed Mr. Mix carelessly, "maybe you'd find it to your advantage to support the amendment when it gets up to the Council. It'll kill off any such unfair competition as you've got now."

The manager shrugged his shoulders.

"If it wasn't for your infernal league, we'd all be makin' money. But"—he grinned wryly—"never thought I'd link up with any reform outfit—but you mail me a copy of your amendment and I'll see how the boys take it."

MR. MIX agreed to post a copy as soon as the final draft was completed, and he was as good as his word. On the same evening, he read the masterpiece to Mirabelle.

"It's perfect!" she said, her eyes snapping. "It's perfect! Of course, I wish you'd made it cover more ground, but just as a Sunday law, it's perfect. When are we going to offer it to the Council?"

"Mirabelle," said Mr. Mix, "we've got to do some missionary work first. And before you can do missionary work, you've got to have a fund."

"Fund? Fund? To get an ordinance passed? Why don't you walk in and hand it to 'em?"

He shook his head.

"We've got to get out printed matter. We've got to spend something for advertising. We've got to—approach some of the councilors the right way."

She sat up in horror.

"Not—*bribe* them!"

"Oh dear, no! I didn't mean corruption. I meant enlightenment." He rubbed his nose reflectively. "But the cost is approximately the same."

"Of course I trust your judgment,

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Theodore, but—how big a fund do you suppose we'll want."

"Oh, I should think five thousand would do it."

"Five! Theodore Mix, how could you spend five thousand dollars for such a thing? There isn't that much in the treasury!"

"But, Mirabelle, haven't we got too much at stake to risk a failure when a little money would guarantee success. If I had five thousand dollars in cash, to spend here and there as I saw the need of it—take one type of man out to dinner a few times, where I could get close to him—loan another type fifty dollars if he asked me for it—and some of 'em would. And leaflets and circulars and one thing and another— But if I have to ask permission from a finance committee before I can let go of a dime, I can't do anything. I'd have to have the money, so I could use it exactly as I needed it. And if I did, I could get support you never dreamed of." He gazed at the ceiling. "Why, with a leeway of five thousand, I'd even have the Exhibitors' Association with us."

"Think so?"

"I know so."

"How?"

"When I say I know, I *know*. And the association's help would go to show that they've seen the light—and want to be considered respectable, wouldn't it? And what a triumph for the league to have converted them!"

Mirabelle went over to her desk and searched the pigeonholes.

"I've good reason to suppose, Theodore, that in August dear John's money will be coming to me." This was the first time she had ever mentioned the subject to him. "I always meant to use some of it for the league." She had unearthed her checkbook and was writing words and figures as angular as herself. "So, really—this is on account." She came over to hand him the check. "You better give me an itemized account of how you spend it, though, Theodore. We've got to be businesslike, even if we are—engaged."

FOR two-thirds of a year Henry Devereux had lived contrary to his taste and to his education. He had labored far more diligently and with far less respite than his uncle had ever intended. He had overcome great difficulties, and he had learned his weaknesses by exercise of strength. He was unassumingly proud of himself, and he was still prouder of Anna. He knew that the major portion of his accomplishment—and especially that part of it which had taken place within himself—was to be put down to Anna's credit. But the spring was coming toward them, and Henry winced to think of it. Heretofore, the message of spring to Henry had been a welcome to new clothes, golf, horseback-parties and out-of-door flirtations. This season, it meant to him a falling-off in the motion-picture business.

The spring was calling to him, but Henry's working-hours were from eleven in the morning until midnight. He sat day after day in his constricted office and glued his mind upon his problems. His nerves were fagged; his muscles were twitching; the inside of his head felt curiously heavy.

The atmosphere of his office nauseated him; the endless parade of petty details was unbearably irksome, but, to Henry, ambition had become a monomania. There were days when he told himself that he would pay a thousand dollars merely to have green turf under his feet, blue sky above, and no worries in his soul for just one little week—but he wouldn't sacrifice an hour of supervision over his theatre. Anna, without the daily stimulus that Henry had, was cheerfully performing the function of a domestic drudge; and his slogan was that if Anna could stick it out, he could.

While the winter favored it, his monopoly had brought a splendid return, but the first warm days had signaled a serious loss of patronage, and Henry couldn't successfully combat the weather. And then the monopoly had been double-edged. It had been a good risk—but it had been too perfect, too prominent. In the beginning, everybody had hailed him as a Napoleon because he had vanquished his little world of competitors. But now that his laurel was old enough to wilt, he was receiving the natural backlash of criticism. The great mass of self-appointed arbiters of business ethics were pointing to him as a follower of the gods of Grasp and Gripe. More disquieting than that, however, were the indications of a new crusade, led by Mr. Mix and directed against the Council. The Mix amendment, which was so sweeping that it even prohibited charity performances on Sunday, would automatically checkmate Henry. To be sure, there was much doubt that it would pass, but it was always a threat.

Despite the strain, however, he was outwardly as blithe and optimistic as usual. When Anna pleaded with him to take a vacation, he laughed her off. He had seen victory slip within his grasp and slip out of it so often that he was on the verge of demoralization, but he thought that he alone was aware of it, and, because of his pride, Anna didn't disillusion him.

NOR did Bob Standish disillusion him; nor Mr. Archer, Henry's firm friend and ally—in so far as Mr. Archer could separate himself into two entities, one of which was ally and the other was trustee. On the contrary, Archer put out numerous remarks which he intended as life-buoys.

"There was a directors' meeting of the Trust and Deposit the other day, Henry, and somehow they got talking about your account. I shouldn't wonder—if you ever wanted to change your business—if they wouldn't give you the opportunity. And if they did, it wouldn't be so very long before they'd invite you on the Board."

Henry disparaged it.

"What as—deputy assistant splinter?"

"No; you've made rather a hit with that crowd, Henry. And even if you aren't a rich man next August, I'm not worrying about you."

"Neither am I. Not while I've got Anna to think up my best thoughts for me."

The lawyer nodded.

"A girl in a thousand, Henry."

"That's the worst insult I ever heard. The population of the world's over two billion!"

Mr. Archer laughed, but his eyes showed approval.

"It's simply something for you to keep in mind, my boy—about the bank. It's a possible career, unless you want to go on with the Orpheum. Of course, you'd have to start pretty low at first, but you know as well as I do that nobody's asked to come into that bank unless he's well thought of."

Henry didn't repeat this to his wife; but on the same day he collected another news-item which he unhesitatingly shared with her. He said to her:

"I saw something down-town that'll amuse you. Cigar store with a sign in front: 'Trading-stamps, premium coupons, and Orpheum Theatre stubs bought and sold.' If that isn't a footprint on the sands of time, I'm going to get measured for glasses."

She laughed, but a trifle recessively.

"I'll be glad when the year's over. Won't you?"

Inspecting her, he realized, with a thrill of self-accusation, that Anna had worn herself out. She was very tired and she showed it. But he knew that when she wanted the year to be over, she wasn't thinking of herself but of him. He paid her the compliment of accepting what she said without tossing it back as though she had meant it for herself.

"Well, I told you I'd drag in the bearded lady and the wild man of Borneo if I had to. What's the matter; don't you like the show business?"

"Well, I didn't know it was going to be quite as awful as this."

"Awful?"

"You know what I mean—you look dreadfully—simply dreadfully!"

Henry was contemplative.

"Would you have wanted me to stay out of it if you'd known?"

She deliberated.

"It's funny—but I don't think I would. I suppose it's been good for both of us. I'll just be glad when it's over. What sort of houses did you have to-day?"

Henry put on his best smile.

"Fair."

"If we should fall down, after all we've done—oh, we can't! Henry, we just *can't!*"

"I used to know a poem," he said, "that kept asking the question: 'Where are the snows of yesteryear?' Well, if I could find out and have 'em shoveled back in the street, we'd be in a good position But as soon as the snow melted, so did the crowds. I'll never look a crocus in the face again. They've croaked us out of a couple of hundred a week gross."

"There's still a fighting chance, though, Henry."

"Ye-es; but Mix's amendment comes up pretty soon, and even if it doesn't pass, I don't see how we're going to compete with this weather. It's so abominably beautiful that it's—sickening."

"Oh—Mix!" she said scornfully. There

was a short silence. "Henry," she burst out, "everything considered, I believe he wants your uncle's money more than we do!"

"Whichever one of us gets it," said Henry grimly, "he'll earn it."

WITH twelve weeks ahead, he faced a deficit of a paltry thousand dollars—and the Mix amendment was peeping over the horizon. He shaved down his expenses to the uttermost penny. There was no economy so trivial that he wouldn't embrace it, and yet his receipts hung steadily, maddeningly just below the important average. Meanwhile, the subject of reform crept out again to the front page of the morning papers.

By strict fidelity to his own affairs, Mr. Mix had kept himself in the public eye as a reformer of the best and broadest type, and he had done this by winning first Mirabelle and then the rest of the league to his theory that organization must come before attack. He had realized very clearly, however, that Mirabelle wasn't to be put off indefinitely; even a reformer must occasionally justify his title. And, besides, his amendment wasn't the sort of thing which could injure the majesty of his general reputation.

On this, then, Mr. Mix had labored with unceasing diligence, and he had spent Mirabelle's money so craftily that thirty-five hundred dollars had done the work of five thousand—and the balance had gone into his own pocket, and thence into the curb market. But as the year came into June and he saw what was happening to Henry's patronage, he told himself cheerfully that, amendment or no amendment, he was justified in buying Mirabelle a wedding-ring. And when a belated epidemic of influenza rode into town on the wings of an untimely spell of weather and the Health Department closed all theatres for five days, Mr. Mix advised himself further that the end of his career as a reformer was in sight and that the beginning of his career of statecraft was just over the hill.

Mirabelle had persisted in keeping the wedding-journey a secret from him. She had hinted at a trip which would dazzle him, and also at a wedding-gift which would stun him by its magnificence. Mr. Mix had visions, on the one hand, of Narragansett, Alaska or the Canadian Rockies, and, on the other hand, of a double fistful of government bonds. He didn't dare to tease her about the gift, but he did dare to tease her about the journey, and eventually she relented.

"I'll tell you," said Mirabelle archly. "We're going to the convention."

Mr. Mix looked blank.

"Convention?"

She nodded proudly.

"The National Convention of Reform Clubs, in Chicago. Aren't you surprised?"

Mr. Mix swallowed and made himself smile, but it was a hazardous undertaking.

"Surprised? I—I'm—I'm paralyzed!"

"You see," she said, "we'll be married on the fourth and be in Chicago on the sixth and be home again on the fourteenth, and the Council won't vote on the amendment until the sixteenth. Could anything have been nicer? Now, Theodore, you *hadn't* guessed it, had you?"

"Guessed it?" he stammered. "I should say not!"

"You could be a little more enthusiastic without hurting yourself any," she said suspiciously.

"I was thinking—the way those dates all dovetail like the tiles on a roof. I never heard of anything like it. Only—well, if you will be so quick at reading my mind, I was wondering if we ought to leave town before the Council meets."

"That's mighty unselfish of you, Theodore, but you said only a couple of days ago you'd done all you could. And the exhibitors'll still be working——"

"That's true—but, then, we've got to see about getting new quarters for the league when our Masonic Hall lease runs out, and——"

"But our advertising'll be running just the same, and the league'll still have its public meetings and all. And everywhere I go I hear the same thing—the people really want this passed. And anybody can find us a hall. I'll appoint somebody. No; you're just as unselfish as you can be, but we'll be back in plenty of time. Truly, Theodore, didn't you guess?"

Much of the jauntiness had gone out of Mr. Mix, but he consoled himself with the certainty that in another two months he would be in a position to become masterful. The week in Chicago would bore him excessively, but he reflected that to any prisoner the last few days before release and freedom, are probably the hardest.

"How could I, my dear?"

"No; you must have thought I'd want you to trapes off on some perfectly aimless, nonsensical trip like a pair of sentimental idiots."

"Oh, you know me better than that," he murmured. "But—if we're really going, I'll have to make a flying trip to New York, first."

"What for?" she demanded.

He said that he was going to confer with his friend, the head of the watch-and-ward society. Mirabelle promptly volunteered to go along, too, but Mr. Mix told her, as delicately as he could, that it wouldn't look proper, and Mirabelle, who worshiped propriety as all gods in one, withdrew the suggestion.

"But before you go," she said, "you've got to do something about the state-wide campaign. You've got to write the literature, anyway."

Mr. Mix felt that he was protected by the calendar, and promised.

BEFORE he went to New York, he wrote three pamphlets, which were marvels of circumlocution as far as reform was concerned, and masterpieces of political writing as far as his own interests were concerned. He had borrowed freely, and without credit, from the speeches of every orator from Patrick Henry to William J. Bryan, and when he delivered the manuscripts to Mirabelle and went off on his solitary junket, he was convinced that he had helped his personal cause and satisfied the league without risking the smallest part of his reputation.

On his return, he stopped first at the Citizens Club, and when he came into the living-room, he was aware that several members looked up at him and smiled oddly.

Mr. Mix had an uncomfortable intuition that something had happened. Could he have been spotted in New York by any one from home?

"What's the joke?" he inquired of the nearest member.

The man laughed.

"You're some strenuous author—aren't you? Didn't know you had that much acid in your system."

"Author? Author?"

From the table at his side the man picked up three pamphlets. One was entitled "The Model Statute," the second was "Local Problems," and the third was "Reform and Regeneration." To each of the three, Mr. Mix's name was signed. He took them up and scrutinized them closely.

"Why, what's so remarkable about these?"

"Well, that one on local problems isn't so bad, but you know, Mix, when you come out in print and tell us that sooner or later you're going to stop the manufacture and sale of playing-cards and——"

"What?"

"And prohibit all public dancing and——"

Mr. Mix looked moonstruck.

"Whoever said *that?*"

"And hand us out sumptuary laws, regulate the length of women's skirts and——"

Mr. Mix caught his breath sharply.

"Where's that? Where is it? Show it to me!"

Obligingly, the member showed him; and as Mr. Mix stared at the pages, the veins in his cheeks grew purple. Mirabelle had edited his manuscripts!

And as soon as he had read two consecutive paragraphs, Mr. Mix knew that the worst wasn't yet to come—it had arrived.

The other man was amusedly calm.

"Well, you're not going to deny you wrote it, are you? Too bad, in a way, though. It sort of puts a crimp in your mayoralty boom—but I guess you knew that, anyway, or you wouldn't have come out with it."

Mr. Mix went out with vast dignity and made for Masonic Hall. Mirabelle was there, in the committee-room, and at sight of him she had a temporary fit of maidenly diffidence. He wanted to slap her; but he didn't even dare to use a tone of voice.

"Those pamphlets—" he began cautiously.

"Oh, yes, Theodore; I look the liberty of making a few slight changes."

"Slight changes! Sleight-of-hand changes!"

Mirabelle drew herself up.

"Do you mean to say you criticize what I did? I couldn't see the sense of being milk-and-watery, even if you could."

Underground politician that he was, he knew that Mirabelle had utterly destroyed the half of his ambition. She had made him a laughing-stock, a buffoon, a political joke. To think that his name was connected with

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a crusade against short skirts and dancing—ugh! "Mayor!" he thought bitterly. "President of Council! I couldn't get elected second deputy assistant dog-catcher!"

Aloud, he said slowly,

"I'm afraid it was premature—that's all."

"Oh, no, it wasn't! You've no idea how people are talking about it."

"Oh, yes, I have," said Mr. Mix.

"Don't get too conceited, though, Theodore. The best part of it was mine."

Mr. Mix's eagle eye saw a loophole.

"You don't think I'm going to take praise for what belongs to you, do you?" he demanded.

"Why——"

"No, sir!" said Mr. Mix. "Not exactly. I'm going to tell the truth about it at our next meeting, and I'm going to send a statement to the *Herald*."

"Oh, it doesn't matter."

"It matters to me. That's the kind of man I am."

"You're too generous," she murmured.

Mr. Mix wiped away a stray bead of perspiration, and breathed more freely. His mayoralty goose was cooked, but at least he could ward off some of the laughs. And there was always the first of August—and plutocracy.

IT was a house wedding, with few guests, no decorations and digestible refreshments. When the ast of the party had gone, Mirabelle approached the bridegroom.

"Theodore, I want you to have your gift before we start. Maybe, after next month, I'll make some kind of a settlement on you, but that's neither here nor there. So—take it, and I hope it's what you wanted."

He took it, and his fingers trembled. A check? And for what generous amount?

"Well? Aren't you going to thank me?"

Mr. Mix tried to speak, but the lump in his throat prevented him. She had given him the equivalent of five thousand dollars, but it wasn't in the form of a check. It was his own demand note, payable to John Starkweather and endorsed by him to Mirabelle. The word "Canceled" was written in Mirabelle's angular hand across the face of it.

As Henry and his wife went down the steps, they exchanged glances and smiled faintly.

"First time I've been in that house for seven months," said Henry, half to himself. "It's a bully old shack, too."

"Still, we're pretty comfortable right where we are, dear."

Henry lagged a little.

"That does hurt my feelings—when you have to camp day in and day out in that measly little joint—not that you haven't made it a mighty pretty place, because you have—without one single day's vacation since last August——"

"But I've told you so often, dear, I'm *glad* to do it if it helps you."

"It helped a lot. If you hadn't done it in the first place, I wouldn't have had the cash on hand to tie up the rest of the picture-houses. But that time's gone by. I don't see why in thunder you won't hire a servant. And at least you could pike up into the country for a week. Why don't you?"

"It's just because I want to play the game out, too. It's only two months more."

"And after that," he said firmly, "we're going to move. I'll have enough to buy a young bungal-house up on the hill, even if I don't get anything from Archer. And then I'm going to make up to you for this year—see if I don't."

"Would you sell the Orpheum?"

"Sell it!" he echoed. "I'd sell it so quick you'd think it was a fake oil-well! I could, too. Bob Standish sends me a proposition from somebody about once a week."

"Don't you believe there's any chance of our catching up, then?"

"Looks pretty black," he admitted. "But if this amendment only holds off, we've still got eight weeks left to think up another scheme."

She squeezed his arm.

"I'm not afraid of the future, no matter what happens. We can take care of ourselves."

"Sure we can!" he said. "I've had two or three different propositions put up to me over at the club. But—Lord—how I hate to be licked!"

She went back to her hated housekeeping, and Henry went back to his hated theatre, and for another week they labored and pinched and saved, each in desperate support of the other's loyalty and sacrifice.

He brought her, then, the morning edition of the *Herald* and pointed out a telegraphic item on the first page.

The policeman, who had brought out a book of blank summonses and an indelible pencil, motioned him to desist.

"They must think it's a sure thing," he said, "and the devil of it is that I guess they're pretty nearly right."

Anna glanced at the head-lines and gasped.

"Mix elected second vice-president of the national organization—and pledges twenty-five thousand dollars to the national campaign fund! Oh—I wish I could say what I think!"

"If a hearty oath would relieve you, don't mind me," said Henry. His chin was squarer than usual, and his eyes were harder. "You can see what happened, can't you? Aunt Mirabelle railroaded him through—and the pompous old fool looks the part—and she let him promise money she expects to get in August."

"Henry, can't we do something? We're only a few hundred dollars short. Can't we make up just that little bit?"

"It's twelve hundred now," he said, "and we're falling further behind every time the clock ticks." He retrieved the *Herald* and abstractedly smoothed out the pages. "That was a great spread-eagle speech of Mix's, wasn't it? Talking about what he's going to do next year!"

"Yes," she said sorrowfully. "Dad's prophecy didn't seem to work out, did it?"

"What prophecy was that?"

"Don't you remember? He said if Mr. Mix only had enough rope——"

"Oh, yes. Well, we gave it to him, all right—only, Mix declined the invitation. He's handled himself pretty well; you've got to grant that. He only made one mistake—and if it hadn't been for that, darned if I don't think they would have elected him to something. But if they ever realize how far that league'll go yet if it ever gets under way—" He stopped abruptly, and then, to Anna's amazement, turned to her with a whoop.

"Henry! What on earth is it?"

Henry snatched up his hat and made for the door.

"More rope!" he said exultantly, over his shoulder. "*Lots* more rope—I'll tell you to-night!"

HE ARRIVED at the city hall before the record-room was open, and he fretted in the corridor until a youthful clerk condescended to listen to his wants. In twenty minutes he was away again, and he was lucky enough to catch Judge Barklay before the bailiff had opened court.

"Hello, Henry!" said the judge. "Did you want to see me about anything?"

"Rather!" said Henry, out of breath. "It's about a comma."

"A what?"

"A comma. Where's your copy of the ordinances?"

"On my desk. Why?"

Henry ran through the volume to the proper place, inserted his thumb as a marker and held the book in reserve.

"Judge, do you suppose the voters really want any of these blue-laws passed? I don't mean the sensible ones, but the wild ones—Mix's stuff."

"No."

"It's simply that the league's got the Council more or less buffaloed, isn't it?"

"That's what I've heard, Henry."

"And yet a lot of people are afraid to stand up against the league for fear they'll be called names?"

"It looks so, Henry."

"But if they ever realized just what a ghastly farce it would be—not even using any of the league's new notions but taking what we've got on the books right now—" He opened the volume of ordinances and read slowly: "Whosoever shall fail in the strict observance of the Lord's Day by any unseemly act, speech or carriage; or whosoever shall engage in any manner of diversion,' "—here he paused impressively—" 'or profane occupation for profit—' " He slung the volume on the desk and faced the judge. "Don't you get it?"

"I'm afraid I don't—quite."

"Why," said Henry, with a beatific grin, "there's a comma after the word 'diversion.' I've just come from the city hall. I've seen the original copy. There *is* a comma. 'Any manner of diversion'—that's one thing. 'Or any manner of profane occupation for profit'—that's something else again, and different entirely. And the Reform League has been shrieking to have that ordinance enforced—to say nothing of the amendment. Well, why not enforce it once. 'Any manner of diversion!'" He began to laugh helplessly. "Oh, come on, Judge; take the pins out and let your imagination down. '*Any* manner of——' "

The judge was whistling softly.

"By George, Henry——"

"Can't you see it working? I'm not sure anybody could even take a nap on Sunday. And——"

The judge stepped past him.

"That's all right, Henry. Stay where you are. I'm just going to telephone Rowland. Hello! Mayor's office, please—" He motioned to his son-in-law. "Make yourself comfortable. I shouldn't wonder a bit if these blue-laws weren't going to get just a little bit—bleached."

On his delirious way to the Orpheum, Henry stopped in to see Bob Standish, not to share the joke with him, for Judge Barklay had laid great stress on the closest secrecy, but in answer to a recent message asking him to call.

"What's the excitement, Bob?"

His friend regarded him with the innocent stare which had made his fortune.

"Remember I spoke to you some time ago about renting that space over the Orpheum?"

"The nursery? Yes."

"Well, it's come up again. Different party, this time. He might want to enlarge it a little, but he's willing to do it at his own expense—and he'd pay eighteen hundred a year."

Henry reflected.

"It's so near the finish—I don't much care one way or the other. Who's the party?"

"Bird named McClellan."

"I don't know him, do I?"

"I don't know why you should—never met him before myself. Well, do you want to trade?"

"I don't much care what I do."

Standish surveyed him closely.

"You're very peppy this morning, seems to me."

"I've got an excuse to be."

"For publication?"

"Not yet. You'll see it soon enough."

"Well, let's get this lease question off our chests. If you'll let me handle it for you, I'll guarantee you'll be satisfied."

"Would you do it if you were in my shoes?"

"Absolutely—provided you were in mine."

Henry laughed.

"All right. Fix it up."

"Good! Now, one thing more—after the first of August are you planning to make any change?"

"I haven't thought that far ahead. I've had one or two things put up to me."

"Forget 'em." Standish pointed at the wall. "Nice new mahogany flat-topped desk right there."

Henry's mouth relaxed.

"Why—Bob!"

As Standish gazed at him, no observer would have said that this immature-looking boy was rated in the highest group of local business men. To a stranger, the offer might have seemed insignificant, even humorously insignificant; but to Henry it was stupendous, and for two reasons.

"Just to think over," said Standish. "In case."

Henry's fists were doubled.

"It isn't so much the—the commercial side of it, Bob, but when I know you've always had me down for such an incompetent sort of——"

"That was before the war. To tell the truth, Henry, last August I couldn't have seen it with the Lick telescope. Thought you were a great scout, of course—good pal—all that—but business! That's different. A friend's one thing, but a partner's a lot of 'em."

Henry was staring fixedly at him.

"I wouldn't have any money to speak of——"

"Then don't speak of it. I'll name the price. The price is your year's profit on the Orpheum."

There was a little silence.

"When did you get this hunch, Bob?"

"Oh, about last February."

"But it was about then that I came in here one day, and—and you said—you said—this sort of thing wouldn't do."

"Oh! But, as I recall it, you were talking about a job."

"Yes; and you said you wouldn't give me one. And ever since then I've been——"

"Idiot!" said Standish. "Is that what's been gnawing at his tender heart? Why—stop right there. If you apologize, I'll slay you. Shake hands and wipe it off your brain. Certainly I wouldn't have you for an employee. But as a partner—that's different."

Everybody's Magazine, September, 1922

AS THE train slowed for the station and a score of other passengers began to assemble wraps and luggage, Mr. Theodore Mix sat calm, although inwardly he was still raging at Mirabelle for making a spectacle of him. It was fully half an hour ago that she had prodded him into activity, ignored his plea of greater experience in ways of travel, and compelled him to get the suitcases out to the platform—she didn't trust the porter—to help her on with her cape and to be in instant readiness for arrival. For half an hour she had sat bolt upright on the edge of her seat, an umbrella in one hand and a satchel in the other; and her air was a public proclamation that no railroad was going to carry her one inch beyond her destination.

By a superhuman effort, Mr. Mix removed his eyes from Mirabelle's convention badge. It was a chaste decoration of three metal bars, two sets of supporting chains and half a foot of blue-silk ribbon with white lettering; and Mirabelle continued to wear it—first, because she was proud of it, and, secondly, because Mr. Mix, in his initial attempt to be masterful, had told her that it looked as though she belonged to the Third Ward Chowder Club. Since then, she had reproached him anew whenever she caught him looking at it. And inasmuch as it could hardly be avoided by any one who cast the briefest glance in her general direction, he had been in hot water from Chicago to the present moment. He couldn't even escape to the smoking-room.

When a man is telling himself that a woman has made a fool of him in public, and that every one in the neighborhood is amused, he finds it peculiarly difficult to carry on a conversation with the woman. But Mr. Mix saw that Mirabelle was about to converse, and, glowering at a drummer across the aisle, he beat her to it.

"Seems to me the league had an almighty gall to wire you for a loan of three thousand dollars, Mirabelle. If it had been my money, I'd have hung on to it until I knew what they wanted it for."

She straightened her lips.

"Well, it wasn't, was it? So I didn't, did I? And it isn't a gift; it's a loan. Treasurer said he needed it right off, and there wasn't anybody else to get it from in a hurry." She caught his eyes wandering toward her gorgeous insignia, and her own eyes snapped back at him. "And I hope at least I'm to have the privilege of doing what I choose with my own money. Don't forget that women are *people* now, just as much as men are. After the first of August, maybe I'll——"

"Mirabelle—sh-h!"

"No, I won't, either," she retorted. "I don't care to shush. After the first of August, maybe you'll have your share, and I won't presume to interfere with you. So don't you interfere with me. If the league had to have money, it was for some proper purpose. And it wasn't a gift; it was a loan. And if I couldn't trust——"

"Oh, give it a drink!" said Mr. Mix, under his breath; and while he maintained an attitude of courteous attention, he barricaded his ears and shut Mirabelle out of his consciousness.

EVEN in Chicago he had received bulletins from the seat of war; they had merely confirmed his knowledge that Henry was thoroughly and irretrievably beaten. A few more weeks, and Mirabelle would be rich. Half a million? That was the minimum. Three-quarters? That was more likely. A million dollars? It wasn't in the least improbable. And Mirabelle had told him in plain English that she planned to divide with him—not equally but equitably. Hm—a hundred and fifty to three hundred thousand, say. And what couldn't he do with such a benefice?

"It's nothing to laugh at, Theodore."

He came to himself with a start.

"I wasn't laughing."

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, dear. Certainly."

"Very well. We'll go out, then."

"Out—where?"

"Out to the vestibule—just as I said."

"But, Mirabelle, we're quite a ways still from the station."

"We're going out to the vestibule, Theodore."

As he rose and escorted Mirabelle down the aisle, he was telling himself that the old-fashioned principle was best—the wife's property ought to pass under the absolute control of the husband.

"Home again!" said Mirabelle, with a sigh of relief. "Home again, and time to get to work! And I'm just itching for it."

Mr. Mix said nothing. He was wondering how soon he could get to his private cache, and whether he had better put in a supply of young onions in addition to cloves and coffee-beans.

"Stop staring at those girls, Theodore!"

"I may be married," said Mr. Mix defensively, "but I'm hanged if I'm blind. Immodest little hussies!"

The train eased to a standstill; he helped her down to the platform. The big car was waiting for them, and, as the door slammed, Mr. Mix sat back luxuriously and beamed on the chauffeur. Yes; virtue had its compensations, and as soon as he had money to his own credit, he would figuratively take Mirabelle by the scruff of the neck and tell her just exactly how to behave, and he would see that she did it. But for the present—soft diplomacy.

Mirabelle clamped his arm.

"Why, what's that policeman stopping us for, right in the middle of a block!"

"Search me." He opened the door and leaned out imperially. "What's wrong, officer? We weren't going over twelve or thirteen——"

The policeman, who had brought out a book of blank summonses and an indelible pencil, motioned him to desist.

"What name?"

Mr. Mix swelled importantly. "But, Officer, I——"

"Cut it out! Name?"

"Theodore Mix. But——"

"Address?"

Mr. Mix gave it, but before he could add a postscript, Mirabelle was on active duty.

"Officer, we've got a perfect right to know what all this is about. I'm the president of the Ethical Reform League." She flirted her badge at him. "I'm Mrs. Theodore Mix—used to be Miss Starkweather."

The policeman tore off a page at the perforation, and handed it to Mr. Mix.

"Judge Barklay's court, Tuesday, ten A. M. Why, you're violatin' City Ordinance One forty-seven."

Mirabelle turned red.

"Now, you see here, young man; I know that ordinance backward and forward."

"Try it sideways," said the unabashed policeman. "Ordinance says nobody can't engage in no diversion on the Lord's day. That's to-day, and this here limousine's a diversion, ain't it?"

"No, it isn't! Oh, Theodore, don't you see what it means? The mayor's weakened. They probably read your speech at Chicago; they aren't waiting for the amendment! They're enforcing the ordinance—better than we ever dreamed of! And that means that you're going to the city hall next autumn." She leaned out and bowed to the gaping officer. "We beg your pardon. You did perfectly right. Thank you for doing your duty. May we go on now?"

The man scratched his head perplexedly.

"Sure! Go ahead. Show that summons to anybody else that stops you."

IN THE two miles to the hill they were stopped seven times, and when they arrived at the house, Mirabelle was almost hysterical with triumph. Without delaying to remove her hat, she sent a telegram to the national president, and she also telephoned to a few of her league cronies to bid them to a supper in celebration. Mr. Mix made three separate essays to escape, but after the third and last trial was made to appear in its proper light as a subterfuge, he lapsed into heavy infestivity and he spent the evening drinking weak lemonade. And while his wife, still wearing her insignia, and his guests were talking in a steady stream, Mr. Mix was telling himself if the ordinance was going to prevent so innocent an occupation as riding in a car on Sunday, he was very much afraid that life in this community was going to be too rich for his blood. That is, after he had pocketed his endowment.

Half-past seven the next morning found Mirabelle at the breakfast-table, and semi-audibly berating Mr. Mix for his slothfulness when he came in with an odd knitting of his forehead and an unsteady compression of his mouth. To add to the effect, he placed his feet with studied clumsiness, and as he gave the *Herald* into Mirabelle's hands, he uttered a sound which annoyed her.

"For cat's sake, Theodore, what are you groaning about?"

"Groan yourself," said Mr. Mix, and put a trembling finger on the head-line. As he removed the finger, it automatically ceased to tremble. Mr. Mix didn't care two cents for what was in the *Herald*, but he knew that to Mirabelle it would be a tragedy, and that he was cast for the chief mourner.

"Well, what's that to groan about? I'd call it a smashing victory—just as I did last night. And our being caught only shows——"

"Rave on!" said Mr. Mix lugubriously, and stood with his hands in his pockets, jingling his keys.

"Certainly. It shows they meant business. It shows we did. We'll take our own medicine. And the amendment—" She broke off sharply; her eyes had strayed back to the smaller type. "Good grief!" said Mirabelle faintly, and there was silence.

Mr. Mix came to look over her shoulder.

LEADING REFORMERS ARRESTED
FOR VIOLATING OWN PET LAW

POLICE ISSUE OVER 2800 SUMMONSES TO GOLFERS, PICKNICKERS, CANOEISTS, CYCLISTS, HIKERS AND MOTORISTS, INCLUDING MR. AND MRS. THEODORE MIX

MAYOR PUTS OVER UNIQUE REFERENDUM
TO SEE WHAT PEOPLE REALLY WANT

SPECIAL MEETING OF COUNCIL CALLED THIS MORNING. ENTIRE CITY ROUSED TO FIGHT BLUE-LAW CAMPAIGN. MIX AMENDMENT DOOMED. ORDINANCE 147 SURE TO BE MODIFIED

Mirabelle collected herself.

"What are you standing around gawking like that for? Find out what time that meeting is. Telephone every member of the committee. They won't have any meeting without us——"

"Save your strength," said Mr. Mix, with a spiritual yawn.

"Save my *strength!* Well, what about saving my five thousand dollars for—for missionary work?"

"The missionary fund," said Mr. Mix, "seems to have fallen among cannibals. Save your strength, my dear. This isn't reform; it's politics, and Rowland's used the steam-roller. We've got to begin all over again, with a real fund this time. You put up forty or fifty thousand, and we'll stage a Waterloo in about two years."

"And you can stand there and— Oh, you coward!"

He shook his head with new dignity.

"No; you're simply lucky Rowland didn't think of it a year ago. If he had, and—" Mr. Mix broke off the sentence and turned pale.

"What's the matter, Theodore?"

MR. MIX slumped down as though hit from behind.

"Mirabelle—listen"—his voice was strained and hoarse—"I may have to have some money to-day—four or five thousand——"

"I haven't got it."

He gaped at her.

"You—you haven't got — four or five thousand?"

She shook her head.

"No; I've spent all Mr. Archer sent me. I——"

As he stepped forward, Mirabelle retreated.

"You're got something of your own, though?" It wasn't an ordinary question; it was an agonized appeal.

"Only a separate trust fund John set up for me before he died—fifty thousand dollars. I just get the interest—sixty dollars a week."

Mr. Mix sat down hard, and his breathing was labored.

"Great jumping Jehoshaphat!" He wet his lips repeatedly. "Mirabelle—listen! If they modify that ordinance—so Sunday shows are legal again—those other fellows'll certainly want to buy back their contracts from Henry. There's only a few weeks—but if Henry only raised a thousand dollars or so, he'd be so close to his ten thousand—" He reached for a glass of water and drank it, gulping. "Henry'll see that. He's got his eyes open every minute. We've got to cut inside of him. Get hold of the man that's the boss of the Exhibitors' Association. Tell him we'll buy a second option to lease the whole string of theatres—as if the league wanted 'em for something. Offer a big enough rent so they'll *have* to accept—so they'd get more out of us than if they opened up. Then they can't buy back from Henry—and he's over a thousand short. I know he is. And if you don't do it—" His gesture was dramatic.

Mirabelle's expression was a potpourri of sentiments.

"Humph. Can't say I like the idea much—kind of too tricky."

Mr. Mix played his last card.

"Don't the end justify the means? If you and I have that money, we'll be philanthropists, and Henry—" He watched her quiver. "And with a fund such as we'd have, we'd begin all over again, and next time we'd win. Wouldn't we?"

"Theodore, I've got fifty-one hundred in the bank. It has to last till August. If you took five thousand of it——"

He snatched at the straw.

"You bet I'll take it! It's for insurance. And you telephone to Masonic Hall and see what's left of the three grand you wired 'em from——"

"The what?"

"The money you sent from Chicago. Get back what's left. Tell 'em you've got to have it. Soon as I find out, I'll hustle down town and get busy."

Mirabelle wavered.

"The Council's going to——"

Mr. Mix gave her a look which was a throwback to his caveman ancestry.

"To hell with the Council!"

For an instant her whole being rebelled, and then she saw his eyes.

"A-all right," she faltered; "I—I'll telephone."

Inside of five minutes she told him that of her loan there was nothing left at all. The money had been wanted for the two-year rental of a new hall, at Three-hundred Chestnut Street; the owner had made a marked concession in price for advance-payment.

"Never mind, then," he rasped. "That's cold turkey. Collect it when you can. Now, give me a check for every nickel you've got. And I'll want the car all day. I want a cup of coffee. And you wait right here until I get word to you what to do next."

"Couldn't I even——"

"You stay here! Far's I know, I'll have you making the rounds of the hock-shops. But"—he relaxed slightly—"but when it's for reform, my dear—when it's for civilization—the league—isn't it worth any sacrifice?"

A spark of the old fire burned in her eyes.

"Humph. Good one of us had got something to sacrifice, if anybody asked me! But here's your coffee. Don't make such a horried noise with it, Theodore."

At noon he telephoned her two pieces of news. The Council, fairly swamped with hundreds of outraged voters, had promptly modified the existing ordinance and unanimously rejected the Mix amendment. And Mr. Mix, who had spent three hours in conference and in battle, had emerged victorious.

"Thank heaven, we're safe! And it only costs thirty-nine hundred." Five of this was Mr. Mix's self-granted commission. "I've got a second option on every last house in town. And I'll need the car all afternoon. I've got to run all over everywhere and close these deals. What are you going to do?"

"Why," she said, with a rueful glance at her check-book, "I guess I'll go down and see how soon I can get that loan back from the league. I'm not used to—putting off tradesmen's bills, Theodore. I wasn't brought up to it."

NOW, after a trial of irresistible force—which was Henry's logic—against an immovable body—which was Anna's loyalty—she had finally consented to run up into the country for a week's respite from the hot weather. Before she left, however, she was first sworn to secrecy and told of the discovery of the lurking comma. She was properly convulsed, but a little later, when her practical instincts had had a chance to assert themselves, she inquired of Henry where there was any benefit to the Orpheum.

"Not a bit," he assured her cheerfully.

"Not even if the Council——"

"Dearest, it doesn't make the difference of the billionth part of a counterfeit Russian ruble."

She regarded him curiously.

"Are you as cheerful as all that just because you're hitting back at Mr. Mix?"

Henry said that he was indeed as cheerful as all that—yea; more so. He was merely snagging the rope which had already been paid out, and it was glory in his pocket, because so many people before him had found the rope twitched out of their hands.

She thought that this indication of a vengeful spirit was out of place in his character, but she forgave it, because at least it was founded on humor. And when he took her to the train, she forgave it on another score, because she realized that not since last autumn had she seen him so fundamentally boyish and irresponsible. She was glad that so much of his spontaneity had come back to him, but at the same time she was puzzled, for it didn't seem altogether like Henry, as she had analyzed him, to gloat so thoroughly over mere retaliation.

On Monday, he met her at the station, and as soon as she saw him, she remarked again the extraordinary uplift of his mood. She had read the *Herald*, and taken deep enjoyment from it; but Henry had a hundred unpublished incidents to tell her. One of them concerned his own escape from possible complications by closing the Orpheum, issuing passes good for the following week, and spending the day in the library of the Citizens Club—and in her amusement, and also in her happiness to be back with him, she didn't notice that Henry was driving her to the Orpheum instead of to their apartment.

"Why, what are we stopping here for, dear?"

Henry's laugh had a pronounced overtone.

"To meet Mr. Archer. I thought you'd like to be in on it."

"In on what?" She caught his arm. "Henry! Has something happened? Has it?" She stared at him, and as she recognized what might be hidden behind his expression of exquisite, unreserved joy, she was almost as frightened as if he had looked despairing instead of joyful.

"It wasn't settled until last week," he said, still with that wide, speculative smile, like a baby's. "It really wasn't settled until Saturday. And it won't be positively settled until we've seen Archer. And there he is, waiting for us. I couldn't get him before—he was in the country for the weekend."

SHE was sitting in Henry's tiny office, and Mr. Archer was sitting beside her, and Henry was standing at his desk, pawing over a heap of ledgers and cash-books.

"Mr. Archer," he said, "there's no use waiting until the first of the year. Either we've made good by this time or we never will. Here's the books. They'll show a net profit, including Saturday's deposit, of ten thousand five hundred—to date."

Anna turned weak and faint, but she gripped the arms of her chair and clung fast to what was left of her poise.

"It's a matter of interpretation," Henry went on. "And, of course, you're the interpreter. It came up so suddenly last week that I couldn't get hold of you. But I took a chance, anyway. Does a lease count?"

The lawyer looked very sober.

"A lease?"

"Yes. If I leased part of the theatre to somebody, would the income from that count?"

During the resulting silence, Anna distinctly heard her own heart beating. She looked at Mr. Archer and saw that his brows were drawn down. Fearfully, she hung on his reply.

"That's a delicate question, Henry. You were supposed to make your profit from the operation of the theatre."

Henry was tense.

"I don't mean if I leased the theatre. I mean if I leased some part of it—some part that wouldn't interfere with the show."

Anna closed her eyes. Mr. Archer's brows had risen to normal.

"Why, in that case, I should certainly say that the income would count, Henry. Let's see the lease."

Anna wished that Henry would come over to her and hold her in his arms while Mr. Archer, with maddening deliberation, glanced through the long typewritten document. But Henry had turned his back, and was gazing out of the window.

"Peter McClellan? What's he want so much space for?"

Henry made no response. There was a long hiatus, broken only by the rustling of the pages.

"Just a minute, Henry. Some of this is all right—and some isn't. The space you mention is what you're using now for the—er—nursery, I take it. And the privilege of the lessee to enlarge the upper story at his own expense is all right." His brows had gone down again, and Anna shivered. "But even if you've got your whole rental in advance, you aren't entitled to claim all of that as this year's income. As a matter of fact, you actually earn a twenty-fourth of that whole payment every month for twenty-four months."

Henry spoke over his shoulder.

"You haven't read far enough."

"Oh!" Mr. Archer laughed, but his voice was no lighter. "Why, how on earth did you persuade anybody to execute such an agreement as this?"

Henry faced around.

"Bob Standish engineered it. He told McClellan as long as he was going to pay in advance, anyway, to get a bargain it wouldn't make any difference to him, and it made a lot to me how we put it on the books. Nine hundred and fifty a month for July and August and fifty a month for the next twenty-two months."

"But, my dear boy, you still don't earn more than a twenty-fourth of the whole rental each month. It makes no difference when the lessee pays. All you can credit yourself in July and August is——"

"Oh, no, Mr. Archer. There's a consideration. You'll find it on the next page. I'm to keep the theatre closed every afternoon in July and August so the lessee can make his alterations to the second story. And the extra price for those months is to pay me for loss of revenue from the theatre. Maybe I'm no impresario, but, by gosh, I can keep a set of books!"

Mr. Archer nodded briskly.

"That is different. Why, Henry, as far as I can see— What's this? 'Three hundred Chestnut Street?' But the Orpheum's on Main."

"Three hundred Chestnut is the back entrance," said Henry. He smiled across at Anna, and she stood up and came a perilous step toward him. "Well, old lady," said Henry, and the same wide, foolish smile of utter joy was on his lips.

HE WAS interrupted by the opening of the door. His Aunt Mirabelle stood there, and behind her, in a fluster of dismay and apprehension, stood the chairman of the Quarters Committee of the Reform League.

"Henry! Henry Devereux! You—you swindler!" Her speech was seriously impeded by her wrath. "You—you—you—" She flung a savage gesture toward the little man in the background. "You had an agent show him—show Mr. McClellan—this place through the back door! He didn't know I— Henry Devereux, you've got my three thousand dollars and you're going to give it straight back to me! This minute! Do you *hear?*"

Anna stared at her and at Henry, and sat down plump and cried into her handkerchief from sheer hysterical reaction.

"Oh, yes," said Henry. "Through the back door, if you say so. But that's the regular business entrance. I suppose the agent thought it looked better, too."

'The agent! That Standish man! You conspired. You——"

Henry's chin went up.

"Excuse me, Aunt Mirabelle; but I didn't know the first thing about it until Bob Standish told me he had a client ready to close and to pay in advance. I didn't even know your man by sight. I'd have rented it to anybody on earth on the same terms."

The little chairman edged forward.

"Miss Starkweather—Mrs. Mix—I knew how you feel about motion-pictures, but how could I know you wouldn't want to be in the same building with——"

"Oh, dry up!" She whirled on the lawyer. "Is that fair? Do you call that fair? *Do* you?"

Mr. Archer put his hand on Henry's shoulder and nodded benignly.

"To tell the truth, Mrs. Mix, I can't see where this concerns you personally at all. It's a straightforward commercial transaction between Henry and Mr. McClellan."

"It isn't, either! Mr. McClellan had authority from the league to get us a hall and sign a lease in his own name. I had the directors give it to him myself. But it was my money that paid for it—mine!"

Henry grinned at the lawyer.

"I didn't know it until last Saturday. Bob told me if I'd make a dirt-low rent I could get it in advance, and up to Saturday I didn't even know whom I was dickering with."

His aunt was menacing.

"Henry Devereux, if you try to cheat me out of my rightful property by any such flimflam as this, I—I—I don't know what I'll do!"

"Oh, don't, Aunt Mirabelle," said Henry compassionately. "You know I won't be a hog about it."

Some of the fury went out of her expression, and Mirabelle was on the verge of sniffling.

"That's just exactly it. I know you won't. And the humiliation of it to me! When you know perfectly well if I'd——"

She stopped there, with her mouth wide open. They all waited courteously for her to speak, but Mirabelle was speechless. She was thinking partly of the past and partly of the future, but chiefly of the present—the hideous, unnecessary present in which Mr. Mix was motoring serenely about the city, paying out good money to theatre-managers—Mirabelle's money, not to be replaced. And then—she nearly collapsed—the unspeakable humiliation of retracting her pledge to the national convention! Her pledge through Mr. Mix of twenty-five thousand dollars! And to think of Mr. Mix's place in the community when it was shown—as inevitably it would be shown—that he had acted merely as a toy balloon, inflated by Mirabelle's vain expectations!

"Humph," she said at last, and her voice was a hoarse, thin whisper. "Well—you just wait till I get hold of him!"

Everybody's Magazine, September, 1922

The door had closed behind her. The door had closed behind Mr. Archer. Henry and his wife stood gazing into each other's eyes.

He took a step forward and held out his arms. She ran to him and held tightly to him, and sobbed a little for a postscript.

He stroked her hair gently.

"Well, Archer says it's going to be about seven hundred thousand. What do you want first? Those golden pheasants or humming-birds' wings?"

She lifted her face.

"Both—b-because I won't have to cook 'em. Oh, my dear, my dear, I've l-loved it—I've loved it! I've loved working and saving and being poor with you and everything—b-but look at my h-hands, Henry, and don't laugh at me. But I'm going to have a cook! I'm going to have a cook! I'm going to have a cook!"

"It's all over, dear. No more wild men of Borneo, no more dishes to wash, no more Orpheum. Remember what Aunt Mirabelle said a year ago? She was dead right. Look! See the writing on the wall, baby?"

He swung her toward the door; she brushed away her tears and beheld the writing. It was in large red letters, and what it said was brief and appropriate. It said, "Exit."

IN THE living-room of an unfashionable house on an unfashionable street, Mrs. Theodore Mix sat in stately importance, composing a message to the unsympathetic world. As her husband entered, she glanced up at him with chronic disapproval; she was on the point of giving voice to it, not for any specific reason but on general principles, but Mr. Mix had learned something from experience, so his getaway was almost simultaneous with his entrance.

"Mail!" said Mr. Mix, and, on the wing, he dropped it on his wife's desk and went on out of the room.

The mail consisted of one letter. It contained the check which Henry sent her regularly on the first of each month.

She sat back for a moment and stared out at the unfashionable street. Mix was always urging her to live in a better neighborhood; but with only her own two hundred and fifty a month and four hundred more from Henry, she could hardly afford it—certainly not while she gave so generously to the Reform League.

She thought of the big brick house on the hill and sighed profoundly. She would have made it a national shrine, and Henry—Henry was even worse than his uncle. He kept it full of people who were satisfied to squander the precious stuff of life by enjoying themselves. It made her sick simply to think of Henry. People said he and Bob Standish were the two cleverest men that had ever lived in town. Doubled the Starkweather business in two years. Directors of banks. Directors of the Associated Charities and the hospital. Humph. As if she didn't know Henry's capabilities. Just flippancy and monkey-tricks. And married to a girl who was a walking advertisement of exactly what every right-minded woman should revolt against.

She sighed again and went back to the lecture she was composing: "The Influence of Dress on Modern Society." Suddenly she cocked her head and sniffed. She rose cautiously, as one who is about to trail suspicion. She went to the side window and peered out.

From a little grape-arbor on the lawn there floated to her the unmistakable odor of tobacco—yes; and she could see a curling wisp of smoke.

"Theodore!"

A pause.

"Yes, dear?" Mr. Mix's voice had taken on, some months ago, a permanent quality of languor, and never since the day that he was laughed out of politics had he regained his former dignity and impressiveness.

"Is that you—smoking again?"

"Why——"

"Are you? Answer me."

"Why—yes, dear—I——"

"Come in here this minute!"

Mr. Mix emerged from the arbor.

'Yes, dear?"

She brandished her forefinger at him.

'I told you what would happen next time I caught you. Not one single cent do you get out of me for many a long day, young man. Come in here; I want you to listen to what I've written."

Mr. Mix's shoulders sagged, but he didn't stop to argue.

"Yes, dear," he said pacifically; "I'm coming."

Triangle

No One Is So "Hard-Boiled" as to Be Entirely Lacking in Sentiment. It's There in Every One, Though You Don't Always Know It, as in the Case of the Detective in This Exceptional Story by a Well-Known Author

By Donn Byrne

THERE is a mystery of setting, of background. Against a scene of towering cliffs and querulous sea-birds, the buffoon's grin and shuffle are out of place, inharmonious. And the buffoon himself knows it. And, little by little, subconsciously perhaps, but inevitably, the buffoon assumes dignity, asceticism. His stride lengthens. The grinning upward corners of his mouth compose into a severe mask. And that in a little space of time. In many years the buffoon would fade into an austerity. And putting him into another setting for a little while, before he became once more a protean liquid, you would see in his eyes, his gesture, his composition, the harsh, high cliffs, the panel of sand, the wheeling birds——

In each person, somehow, you sense his background. Your horseman will bring to your mind the clump of hoofs in stalls, the satin coats, the patient eyes, the swishing tails of horses, the ammoniacal smell of leather, though he were dressed like a dandy of the Junior League. You can reconstruct him, his hand caressing a glossy neck, his feeling of curb and girth. You can tell your actor in a drawing-room, his gestures, not stilted but measured, his speech, his walk. He is not at home in life. He is at home in a position where this factor of life and that factor of life equal a dramatic situation. You say this man should not be talking about the chronicles of the day; he should be pondering an emotional equation. Take your sailor. In his eyes you can feel the grip on the bridge rail, and the boat's swerving pitch as the wind bites the weather-bow. You cannot imagine him telling coin in a bank.

Each man brings his background, as old actors used to bring their sets. And you recognize these things not intellectually but sensitively. One who knows can tell that a man is horseman by the position of his elbows, a circular posture of knees. One can tell the sailor by his narrowed eyes, the difference between hands and feet. One can tell the actor by certain mannerisms, his subconscious pause at a door to give his exit dramatic value. The intellectual method is fallible. The other is infallible.

Everything tends to grow into line and color with its surroundings. The brown heron is indistinguishable in the reeds. The tiger has the light and darkness of skin corresponding to the patchwork color of the forest. And scientists say that this is for protection. But I challenge that as superfical, too shallow for truth. It may protect, but it is not for protection. It is deeper than that, very deep—too deep for me.

You might not immediately recognize what was the background of Detective Thomas Denihan; you might not recognize him as a police officer at all. But you could not imagine him as a head waiter, say, or owner of a garage. You could fit him into no particular background. A stalwart man of forty-five with hard blue eyes—physical condition not so good as a professional athlete's, but better than the average man's. He had black hair. His hands were powerful and hairy, but without the calluses of labor. His clothes were usually of blue serge with a black bowler hat. His shoes were normal. His jaw was powerful but not truculent. He was about five feet ten in height, and weighed somewhere near one hundred and ninety pounds. The only thing peculiar about him were his eyes. They had the trained inscrutability of a gambler's; but where a gambler's eyes were defensive, his were ready to attack. There is a subtle difference I cannot express in words.

There was no street in New York on which Detective Thomas Denihan could not walk unnoticed if he wished. He was an invisible man in this respect—that he was so like any other man you would pay no attention to him. He might be alone in the street, and if you were questioned later, you would say, "Yes; I—I think there was a man in the street—some man, just."

But let him stop you for a minute, though you were the most innocent person in the world, and drop his hard eyes on you, and you wouldn't say, "You've made a mistake, I'm afraid." You would say: "What is this? What does this man want, mean?" It would stop you short as a stone wall. There was power and will—immense power and implacable will. For the first time in your life, probably, you recognized the terror of the law. And you were sorry for poor devils who had broken into silk-lofts, and harassed bank clerks who had falsified accounts. You were sorry with an acute personal shock. You thought: "Poor devils! They could never get away."

You would recognize him as a detective when you are so told, but from himself you would not recognize his background. We on the hither side of the law have grotesque ideas of the actions and reflexes of those without the pale. Centuries of inhibitions have given us a romantic slant toward the criminal. Our murderer of women is the quaint Bluebeard. Our highwayman is Robin Hood. Our man-killer is haunted by the ghost of his victim. Our robber buries his treasure in fear. Correspondingly, our detective has his color, the nose of a bloodhound, the reasoning faculty of a Pascal, the bravery of some hero of a book. Also do we make of him one who follows the criminal, outraged by the offense against public morals.

So we have imagined unto ourselves an underworld, much as we have imagined fairies, gnomes, black magicians. We have imagined a simplicity of evil, which, if true, could soon be conquered. We have imagined a series of black splashes against a wall of cream, and our duty is to clean these and the world will be well. But it is much more complex. Have you seen settlement workers go down to the underworld and come back, their hearts broken—or remain there, their faces taking on an immense spiritual strength? They set out thinking as you do—that the problem was a simple equation, and they found it to be an egregious calculus. Very complicated. Very unsimple— Let us see it through the eyes of Detective Thomas Denihan.

FOR him, as he walked through the streets of New York, men and women and children were not human beings. They were potentialities of evil. He never thought of them as having warm feelings, a love of husband and children, a love for mother, a delight in a secure home. He never though of them as singly radiating beneficence. Were you to take the finest, prettiest woman in New York, and say to him, "Ponder over her," what would rise in his mind would not be a picture of her in happy wifehood, or sacred as a mother, or strangely calm and beautiful in her November days. He would think of her in her future days after marriage falling for some guy, as his phrase was, and back of that were possibilities of blackmail, burglary, murder, even. Or she might be bitten with the fever of card games, and that growing on her, become dissatisfied with the tameness of card games at home, and be introduced to the surreptitious apartments where roulette wheels click and private telephones bring results of races. Or, in the ordinary business of life, her nerves might become worn, and she might indulge in harmless-seeming specifics that bring one to the gray land of drug-addiction by minute steps.

Point out to him an honest young bank clerk, and he would think: "Some day some guy may show him a wad of jack he's won on a lucky long shot. And this kid thinks it's fun and plays safe little bets. And then, one day, some wise cracker gives him an inside tip, and he takes a chance, and whether he wins or loses, he's a gone guy."

Or show him a young couple of New York starting out in life, and his thought would run thus: "This kid'll work, but the girl will get lonely after a while, and some gay fellow'll come and take her round to dances, and the kid will get good and sore. And some day he'll go over to Newark—see?—and buy him a gun, and he knocks the pair for a goal. And then we comes and gets him."

The motivation of crime, the extenuating factors, he did not regard. They weren't his business. That was up to a judge and jury. All his job was to tap a man on a shoulder and say, "Listen, kid; you got to come along with me."

All New York for him was composed of criminals, virtual or potential, and rich men. He had a strange theory that any man worth over a million dollars was a crook. It was not so much a theory as a conviction. If you were to argue with him, he would keep repeating: "Well, how did he get it? Tell me; how'd he get it?" And as higher mathematics, economics were beyond him, he could not be convinced. On the rare occasions when a man of financial standing absconded, there would be a glint of triumph in the blue eyes. "Didn't I tell you? What did I say? Didn't I tell you."

Of the city that is good he knew nothing. Itself was only a background against which the forces of evil played their drama. Of homes where illegality did not exist, he only knew those of his fellow policemen—plain-clothes or harness men. And to his mind they did not belong to the city. These people and their families were a caste apart, as players are, or folk of the circus. And their conversation ranged about civic politics or the cost of uniforms, and sooner or later came to crime. The wives of these men had a seal of secrecy, as it were, upon them, and even their children were marked. Other children seldom played with them, being overcome with awe.

But of New York where illegality is current there was nothing Denihan did not know. Hardly a pawnbroker in the city but was in close touch with him, for it is the business of the detective to watch the outlet of gain, nearly all crimes being gainful. He knew also the saloons where crooks gather in a back room. He knew the women who cherished outlaws like themselves. At each great boxing-match in Manhattan, as the crowds poured through the turnstiles, somewhere near at hand was Denihan. And when that most innocuous-seeming of all things, the six-day bike-race, was in progress, you would be sure Denihan was prowling round, for the six-day bike-race has some strange attraction for the underworld. Lap after lap they watch the circling riders in a dull maze. And there you would always find Denihan strolling, his head filled with portraits of men wanted for murder, wanted for burglary, wanted for this, wanted for that. He was always alert, was Denihan. He was counted one of the best dozen detectives in the world.

Now, here is where I should, according to the technic of authorship, cite an example or so of Denihan's cleverness. I ought to make him vivid to you by a trick of the trade, as the phrase is—show his paces as one shows the paces of a horse. But any policeman could tell it more truthfully than I. Any writer of melodrama could make it vivid, if untruthful. The parlor magic of my profession is very hollow to me. So you must see him a stocky, clean-shaven man, black hair under a citizen's hat, his eyes, blue and cold as ice, never friendly, not inimical. You must sense his unhurried stride. You must understand his being in a gathering and hardly visible. He was there. You wouldn't know he was there. But he was there. Wait! Have you ever seen a pair of handcuffs? They are not a weapon. They are not offensive or defensive. But they are a fact. And they are very terrible—cold, heavy, incredibly strong. They chill you. You rarely see them. They are produced in need. There they lie, cold, chilling, gray. They have not the cogency of a revolver. They do not threaten as a black-jack does. There they lie, a seemingly dead arabesque of steel. And — click, click! Detective Thomas Denihan!

I CONSIDER it one of the most unhuman traits of Detective Thomas Denihan that, though unmarried, and having no relatives about whom he cared a tinker's curse, he elected to live alone in a house of his own. I don't know if he ever had any love for a woman, but if he had, it must have been very long ago. He never considered marriage—for this reason: He had seen so many women of the underworld, their intense brief loyalty, and then their men went to jail, and perhaps from loneliness, perhaps from the urge of necessity, they took up with new partners and sooner or later contracted another underworld union. So they seemed to him fickle, untrustworthy. And ordinary women were to him as strange as a foreigner is to us. There is a subtle barrier.

As for his living alone and not in a boarding-house, he had an undefined feeling. He didn't want to mingle with people, to have them know him. Also, they were a little afraid of him.

So Detective Thomas Denihan lived in the lower part of a two-family house he owned in Flatbush, on one of those avenues named after letters of the alphabet, and near the junction called romantically King's Highway. The tenants of the upper apartment he rarely saw. They were a clerk in some department of the city works and his fat wife. Once a month they left their rent in the mail-box. He had only one servant, an ancient woman who kept the house clean and got his breakfast. She was continually mumbling about the County Kilkenny in Ireland, and her false teeth were defective; so he seldom heard her.

In the morning, after breakfast, he would go out, have his shoes shined carefully at the Greek bootblack's, choose from cigars carefully at the corner tobacconist's, buy a morning newspaper, get into the second-last car of the elevated and report for duty in Manhattan. In the evening, coming home, he would remove his shoes with a grunt and, putting on a pair of carpet slippers, rummage in the ice-box for a bottle of beer and for the roast-beef sandwich old Mary O'Brien had made ready for him, and, sitting down to them, he would read carefully an evening newspaper. And then, after a while, he would get up and go to his bedroom, take off his coat, wind his watch, put shield, gun and handcuffs to one side, undress, folding his clothes carefully, put on an old-fashioned nightshirt and go to bed. After a few shakes, a grunt or two, a punch at the pillow, he would be asleep.

NOW, to all of us, a certain distinct entity will symbolize an abstraction. To Detective Thomas Denihan, all crime was symbolized by the Royter Gonof. The Royter Gonof was in crime what Denihan's self was in detection of crime.

At the police headquarters anywhere you will find the record of crimes imputed to the Royter Gonof—crimes which it is difficult to prove but in which, according to conviction and belief, the Royter Gonof was implicated. The Royter Gonof, which is Yiddish jargon for Red Thief, began his career on the New York East Side, robbing, holding up small Jewish stores. He is, I regret to admit, of Irish ancestry, and his name possibly is McCarthy or Kelly or Kavanagh. However——

There is a hiatus between his robbing push-carts and his organization of gangs to do it for him. There was a brief splurge in business—theatrical, I take it. And suddenly the Royter Gonof blossomed out as one of America's greatest confidence men.

His appearance, from all I hear, is magnificent. Consider six feet of bone and muscle, one hundred and ninety pounds of sheer strength. Consider an open, trust-inspiring Irish face. A great boxer, a great actor was lost in the Royter Gonof. Consider that waving chestnut hair, those gray eyes. Consider his dress, up to the minute, and not flashy enough to rouse suspicion. Were he a thin man, one might have steered clear of him, but who would ever associate crime with a bulky, robust man. Ah, solidity!

And so he went up and down the country, playing on his assumption that all men are fools and ninety-five per cent. of them essentially dishonest. And I wonder can you blame him. When the Royter Gonof has been rotting in jail for years, men will be leaving for Barcelona to get the fortune of the Spanish Prisoner. Solid farmers of the Middle West will enter into a dishonest combine to cheat a pool-room by the supposed tapping of a wire. And automobile manufacturers will thrust thousands into the hands of artists like the Royter Gonof to avoid the publicity of having been at a private ring-fight where one of the boxers was supposedly killed. And amateurs will insist they are shrewd enough to play cards for high stakes with professional sharps. This will always go on until men respect the law that protects them. One day they will; one day hens will swim. There will always be crooks and fools to be fleeced. But there will be few crooks like the Royter

Gonof. Few will figure any more that passion existed in the brain under that red head where was a surgeon's cool patience. And they will not be deceived by the hearty bluffness that concealed contempt. They were a well-matched pair—Denihan and the Royter Gonof. But Denihan was the better man. Denihan won.

I should like to have seen that comedy in New York with the stake for one man's liberty and a supposed fool's money. And Denihan posing as a saloon-keeper of Larchmont, lately having sold out. And the Royter Gonof, the bluff sportsman, familiar of the race-tracks and enemy of the poolrooms, who knew a good thing and how to pull a trick. A dissatisfied employee of the telegraph service who would hold back the result of a race and give them the information, so they could bet a sure thing. And the pretty lady who toiled to get Denihan's heart. And the bell-boys and the taxi-cab drivers planted to assure Denihan that "Mr. Schuyler—he's a prince!" And the marked money passing. And the sudden clicking of handcuffs, and other detectives appearing, as in a conjuring trick. And after a moment's puzzlement, the gray eyes of the Royter Gonof being leveled at Denihan. And the extraordinary mellow laugh——

"You poor flat-footed copper, you don't think you've got me?"

"I'll say I have!"

And it looked so in the Tombs. It looked so in New York when the judge passed sentence on him. There Denihan left him. And at Grand Central, when he was being brought to Sing Sing, there appeared six of New York's toughest. And right in public came the cracking of automatics. And two dead men on the cold floor. And the whisking of the Royter Gonof to the waiting car. While the onlookers wondered when the movie would be released and searched the galleries with their eyes for the grinding camera.

WITH the escape of the Royter Gonof there rose in Denihan a terrific burst of passion. He had worked so long, so cunningly. Technically, all success was his, but materially he had lost something immense. To have put the Royter Gonof behind bars— And he blamed himself; he blamed the whole force passionately, though he knew there was no blame to be attached to any one. The Royter Gonof had escaped. That was all. And it was up to Denihan to get him again. The boiling salt of his passion crystallized into cold gray intent.

"The next time, I'll put him behind bars myself," he promised. There would be no hitch.

And now there was a newer zest to it. The Royter Gonof was wanted for complicity in murder. Everywhere was his portrait: "Wanted for Murder." And his aliases—alias Ernest Forbes-Jones, alias Brooklyn Red, alias Fordney Schuyler, alias this, alias that.

There was also now a knowledge in police circles that the Royter Gonof was more than an extremely capable confidence man, "the king of the con men," as some newspaper writer phrased it. He was a bad guy. It wasn't a matter of tapping him on the shoulder and saying, "Hey, fellow; the chief wants to see you." It was take your life in your hands, for the Royter Gonof, having openly brought about two murders, would not stick at a half-dozen. But they weren't worried. Denihan could handle him. And that Denihan would one day get him was never in doubt. "When Denihan gets the Royter Gonof—" they used to say, with as much certitude as, "When spring comes——"

Now, it would seem an easy thing to go out and get a man wanted for murder—a big red-headed man—in the city of New York. And people are forever blaming the police for not solving the riddles put up to them. But one rarely lays one's hands on a man in flagrant deliction. One has to find out who did it first, and then how to get him. Granted the first, the second is no easy task. People are traced by stable property and stable emotion. And criminals' property is very fluid. One usually catches them by their emotions. A father, a mother, a wife they love. And then one must be on the watch all the time. One listens for rumors. And only one rumor out of many has a scintilla of truth. And when that is traced to the source, it is usually too late. Also, criminals die, as others do, and there is no publicity to their burial. An unknown passes out in a hop-joint. A careless look from a coroner, and he is thrown in the potter's field. And the police who want the men seldom know that Sergeant Death, as we Gaels call him, has executed a prior warrant. They go on looking.

And if he is still alive, it is hard. For every thing helps the criminal. They develop the mystery of intuition. And the crowd through which they glide hampers pursuit by the policeman. There is needed patience—infinite patience. They wait for the infinitesimal slip. And sometimes the slip passes unnoticed——

But all this notwithstanding, Denihan knew he would one day get the Royter Gonof.

It seemed to him, looking forward, that the putting of the Gonof behind bars would mark a point in his career from which he would spring to immense things. What exactly, he did not know—he might open a detective bureau of his own. He might somehow transfer to the federal service. To be commissioner of police in his native city of New York was not outside the bounds of possibility. All this after the Royter Gonof was safely behind bars. Also, there was a tinge of personal vanity in the matter, for the Red One had sent him a note.

"Somewhere in Yonkers," it was addressed from, and it suggested he stick to the dips of Fourteenth Street or get a job as a house detective—all of which was clumsy and boyish sarcasm but got under Denihan's skin. He smiled grimly and thought, "Wait!"

It became so much of an obsession with him that he would dream day-dreams of the Royter Gonof and the day he would catch him.

On Fifth Avenue perhaps, the Gonof might be walking, and Denihan would circle and come up beside him. "Ain't you and me got a date, fellow? Put out them lunch-hooks. Come on!"

Or he might trail him to a hotel and wake him up, like some dreadful nightmare.

Sooner or later he would get him. At headquarters there was always veiled allusion to the chase of the Royter Gonof.

"Well, how're they coming, copper?"

"Oh, all right."

"Hear anything about this now Royter guy?"

"I'll get him."

"I'll say you will! They say this bird's a tough guy. Shoots an' everything."

" 'S all right."

"I guess we ain't so tender ourselves—hey, copper?"

" 'S all right."

THERE is a period in the career of a great man, a point, rather, where he ceases to be a practitioner of a thing and becomes the thing itself. He more than fades into the background. He becomes part of the background. The financier is one day master of money, and at a later day Money itself. The artist becomes Art, the clerk Routine. They have lost human attributes. They are absolute. And the world fades from them. The exceeding greenness of fields, the fun of a circus, the patter of boxers' feet on a springy floor. Pleasures are deliberate, sought for. Spontaneity dies. It is a very terrible, tragic thing. I think this is what old theologians meant when they spoke of a man losing his soul.

And also in this phenomenon I can see what the theologians call "providence." Before this ghostly transfusion of humanity into the absolute takes place, there is always a chance for a man to anchor himself in the warm human world where people are hurt and cry and are sympathized with, where joy comes and friends are glad, where we will not be blind to the infinity of stars. A man falls in love, I mean, or a child is born—a child of curls and laughter—and once more the sun dances of an Easter morning. There is always the chance for a man. It always happens. Jeer at, sneer at, flout coincidence as much as you like, it exists. The theatrical *deus ex machina* is a crude symbol of a subtle fact. Have things never happened at just the right time? Think back. Just a minute. Think! Forget this bank-book, that debt. Haven't you ever known in your own life— Ah, I thought so!

There was no chance of his marrying. Denihan was not that sort of man. Nor would he ever adventure in the kingdom of little feet. Yet before Denihan ceased being a policeman and became Police, salvation arrived to him. I present Lorna Doone.

She saw him coming down the concrete steps of an alphabetical station near King's Highway. She was a small black pup, very scared, very lonely. Everybody had passed her by, and it was near twelve o'clock and a cold night. And she must have liked the looks of the portly man coming down the concrete steps. She wagged her tail. She stood in his way. He stopped and looked at the moving stern. The brown eyes pleaded.

"Why'n't you home?" He stooped and patted her. "What you doing out so late?" She moved closer. "Huh?" he said as he stood up. "Run on home!" And he started to walk off. A half a block later, he knew she was following him. He turned.

"Run on home! What you following after me for?"

She came closer, her tail wagging slowly. She opened her mouth as Aberdeens do, showing her teeth ingratiatingly.

"What you trying to do—bite me?"

She pulled her only trick—sitting on her haunches, her fore paws in the air, her mouth strained to an open grin.

"For God's sake!" said Denihan. "I guess you got no place to go. I guess you're lost."

Dogs were foreign to Denihan. That is, his heart had never known them. He could never know the pride barbers have in French bulls. And the police dog seemed to him an overrated animal, as, indeed, it is. And the bloodhounds one sent occasionally on the track of murderers was "hick stuff." Also, their loud baying was against the twenty-one cardinal points of detection. This lonely terrier on the edge of Flatbush was the first dog that had appealed to anything human in him.

"Yeah; I guess you're lost," he said. "You better go with me."

There was a precinct station a block away—a great, gaunt place. He picked the pup up under his arm and moved toward it. He went in, his footsteps making a heavy echo in the flagged hall. The lieutenant on duty rose up in respect.

"Anybody lost a dog?"

"No, Sergeant. Not that we heard."

"I found a dog. I thought some one might 'a' telephoned in."

Under his arm, suddenly the pup began to tremble. The gauntness of the room, the hollow echo—all summed up to terrify her.

"No. Nobody telephoned in."

"Well, I found this pup. It had ought to have a license—or something."

"Ain't it got a tag—on its neck?"

"No; it ain't got no tag."

"Well, leave it here, anyway, Sergeant, and we'll take care of it."

"Yeah; I might as well, I guess." He turned to the pup. "I'm going to leave you here. You'll be all right here."

But she was frightened, terribly frightened. Her eyes pleaded. She thrust forward her muzzle and suddenly licked his face.

"I guess I'll take him home. He don't look satisfied to stay here."

"He'll only be a nuisance, Sergeant."

"No; I'll take him home, I guess. Le'me know if any one telephones."

He let himself into the house, snapped the lights on and put the pup on the floor.

"Well, are you satisfied now?"

She wagged her tail.

He went to the ice-box and got his sandwich and beer. He paused.

"Maybe you're hungry. Maybe you'd like something to eat."

He thought a moment and got a tin pan and filled it with milk, as he would for a cat. It struck him, though, that a dog needed more substance, and, fishing round the kitchen, he came on a package of zwiebacks. He broke them into the milk.

"Eat hearty!"

As he fixed up to go to bed, he was bothered a moment.

"I guess you ought to go in the cellar," he figured. "But they ain't no bed for you down there." The pup trotted ahead of him into his own room. "Well, I guess you can't do much harm," he said. He put her solemnly on a couch while he undressed. "You'll be all right there," he said, and he went quietly asleep.

WHEN he woke next morning, he found her standing by his bed, wagging her tail.

"For God's sakes!" he mused. "For God's sakes!"

Old Mary O'Brien leaped in the air when the pup followed him into the dining-room.

"What is this at all, at all?" Her mumbling rose to a querulous squeak.

"That," said Denihan. "That's a dog."

He vouchsafed no more information until he was leaving. He patted the dog on the head.

"If any one calls from the police precinct for the dog, well—well, tell them to call me up. That's all."

At headquarters he sought out John Leidner, who was the possessor of many

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blue ribbons for Airedales, breeding and selling some of the best pups in the state.

"Hey, John," he asked, "what do you do about a dog?"

"What do you mean—what do you do about a dog?"

"How do you keep a dog? What do you give him to eat?"

"Give him anyt'in'. T'ey eat anyt'in'."

"Anything, hey?"

"Anyt'in' but potatoes. Don't give 'em no potatoes."

"No potatoes, hey?"

"No potatoes. Anyt'in' but potatoes. And don't give it no fish. T'e bones stick in d'eir t'roats."

"No potatoes and no fish, hey?"

"Anyt'in' but potatoes an' fish. And don't give it no chicken bones."

"No chicken bones, hey?"

"Yeah; an' give it plen'y t'eat. One good meal a day."

" 'S 'at all?"

" 'At's all. And give it plen'y o' water. It'll be fine. Say, Tom; what kind o' dog is't is you got?"

"Ah, a li'l' black dog."

" 'T ain't a poodle? You know—one o' t'em black poodles?"

"No; 't ain't a poodle."

" 'T ain't a cocker spaniel, hey? Flopsy ears an' everyt'in'."

" 'S got small ears."

" 'T ain't one o' t'em Scotch terriers? One o' t'em—you know——"

"No. I don' know."

"Was you ever in a gin-mill?"

"Sure I was in a gin-mill."

"Well. I know you was in a gin-mill, but t'is—t'e's a picture of Scotch whisky in a gin-mill wit' two dogs—t'em's Scotch terriers."

"I ain't took no notice."

"Well, t'ey's a gin-mill on T'irty-seventh Street has them."

"T'irty-seventh, hey?"

"T'irty-seventh and Sixt'."

"Sixth, hey? Well, much obliged, John."

"Oh, t'at's not'in'. Say, Tom; ever hear any't'in' about—you know—the Red Guy?"

"I'll get him."

"I'll say you will, boy. We're for you."

He rang up the ancient Mary O'Brien. She came to the 'phone all aflutter.

"This is Denihan. Say—about the dog—you know, the dog. Don't give him no potatoes. And no fish. . . . Fish. I said fish—what swims—what you eat on Friday. And no chicken-bones. You know—chickens. None o' them bones. Anybody call up about him? . . . No. All right. Ring off. Goo'-by."

"Guess it must o' dropped out o' some car," Denihan surmised the case of the dog.

IN THE saloon on Thirty-seventh Street, Denihan stood opposite his glass of buttermilk. He watched the picture of the Scotties.

"That's him," he decided.

The accent of a Scottish golf professional at his native ritual of drinking whisky commanded Denihan's attention. He edged nearer.

"Them's a good dog?" he hazarded.

"Best dog in the world," the garrulous Scot burred. "Barring the Scotch deerhound, the Scotch terrier is the greatest dog alive."

"Will you have something?" said Denihan.

"Oh, I don't mind. Maybe I will. A wee bit whisky."

"So you say them's a good dog?"

"Well, if you want to know, mister—" And the Scot told an egregious story of the dog possessed by his cousin, Mungo MacMungo, of St. Mungo's—a story my Gaelic ancestry inhibits me from retelling, but suffice to say that it exampled a sagacity rivaling the elephant's. "And as for fighters—och, I could tell you stories!"

"Will you have another little——"

"Och, I don't mind, a sup o' whisky. Well, I had another cousin, Donald MacDonald, of Donaldston, and another man in this town had a bull pup—" In a righteous cause the Scotch terrier had the ferocity of a saber-toothed tiger. "But they're aye a gentle dog," he went on. And under the stimulus of a third treat, he gave the impression that the thirteen children of his cousin married to Farrell MacFarlane were raised through the efforts of a conscientious-working terrier.

"So them's a good dog, hey?"

"You might say, mister!"

Denihan turned to go, but the praise of his dog had warmed his heart to such an extent that he ventured advice to the golf professional.

"Y'ought to lay off o' that stuff. That

ain't no good. Y'ought to leave that alone."

But the Scot had a theory of his own.

"Och, away wi' you, mon! You're daft. That's the greatest thing in the world, that. It hardens the gut——"

NO ONE ever turned up to claim the pup, so after a while he accounted it his own. He had talked to another friend of his about the disposition of the dog.

"What do you do with a dog?"

"What do you mean—what do you wit' a dog?"

"A dog you found—what do you do with it?"

"If they ain't no owner found, you can keep it or you can send it to t'e Bide-a-wee Home."

"What's the Bide-a-wee Home?"

"A place w'ere t'ey keep los' dogs, and if a guy wants a dog he send t'ere, and he gets it for not'in'. So as t'e chinks don' get him."

"T'e chinks?"

And Detective Thomas Denihan was regaled with some of the mysteries of Chinese chop-suey—which may or may not be true, but gives room for thought.

With more gusto than and as much importance as if he were taking out a marriage-permit, he got a license for the dog. He put the tag round its neck with a sort of ceremonial awe.

"Now you're my dog—see? You're my dog."

And she wagged her tail and showed her teeth in her grotesque grin, and her eyes were filled with recognition.

"You're my hound—see?"

A small boy who sold a weekly periodical was commandeered by him.

"Boy, want to make some money?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take this hound for exercise an hour a day every week."

"Yes, sir."

" 'S worth two dollars a week," Denihan expanded. "But you got to be careful. You got to take him where he won't be run over by cars or anyt'ing. You got to be careful of him."

"It ain't a him. It's a she."

"For God's sake!"

"Yeah; it's a she. Didn't you know it was a she."

"No. For God's sake!"

Everybody's Magazine, September, 1922

"What do you call her?"

"What's her name, hey? Well, her name is—her name is a good Scotch name. Her name is Lorna Doone. Yeah; that's her name." He leaned down and patted her. "How do you like that? Ain't that a good one? Lorna Doone—that's your name."

His life had become surprisingly complete now. For some particular reason, it was a pleasure to come home. Home was no longer a place to sleep. As he came along the alphabetical street of evenings, she would be at the door scratching to get at him. She would jump clumsily at his knees. She would gambol like a young lamb. And great games would go on between them. He would affect not to notice her when eating in the morning, while she sat there waiting for a lump of sugar. Also, his main dietary at breakfast became chops or liver, and he would give her a bone or a little edge of liver, and her ears would stand up and her eyes sparkle. Every morning he took a dignified but affectionate farewell of her on the porch.

"Well, so long, old lady!"

On his days off, which, before now, he would usually spend on a sofa or hammock, reading or smoking cigars, he took her out for long walks, down to Brighton Beach or Coney Island. And many a policeman would smile in surprise to see hard-boiled Denihan and his little ward. Once or twice an innocent patrolman ventured to wonder that he didn't have a bull or at least an Airedaile, and drew upon himself a disquisition upon the origin, habits, ferocity, and loyalty of the Scotch terrier rather boring to hear.

All the dammed-up affection in Denihan's heart turned to the little dog. And it didn't evince itself in sloppy way, but with a grotesque dignity. He was dignified, even when giving her a bath in the big tub.

And on her part she loved him, and she began to take on some of his characteristics, as dogs do—his dignity, his alertness, his aloofness. It is a very strange thing how a dog comes to resemble its owner. Is there some occult current between them?

Once Denihan burst out,

"If I ever found a woman like that"—and he pointed to Lorna Doone—"I'd marry her!"

And yet, if you noticed him in the street, which you hardly would on account of his low visibility—if you came to recognize him, let us say, you would still get the cold clink of handcuffs. These he was still, the gray, invisible man, the symbol of the cold sword of the law. His eyes blue as ice, and as cold. His brain crammed with pictures of this one and that one wanted for this thing and that thing. He has seen you a thousand times, if you pass through Pennsylvania Station or Grand Central. He has seen you a hundred times if you go to boxing-matches. He has seen you a dozen times if you are patron of the six-day bike-race. And if you occasionally go to a burlesque show— Of course not! I beg your pardon. But Denihan has seen you, ticked you off and never given a second look—unless you are a big man with gray eyes and red hair.

There is a great French poet visiting New York—a man with gray eyes and a great red beard. And he tells a story of a squat black man who has followed him, rushing up to shake hands suddenly, tapping him on the shoulder, asking for a match, and ending by tweaking his whiskers. The poet called a policeman, but the policeman only laughed. "*J'ai fini par lui lancer une claque à la figure. Non; je n'ai pas réussi.*" I should like to have seen Denihan side-step that slap on the cheek.

The influence of the small warm thing at home did not detract from his steely desire to get his man. He thought with two parts of his head. One went to the little dog. And one was for the great murderer and confidence man. Early in the morning the dog went out of the foreground and entered the possible Royter Gonof. And the day being done, the Royter Gonof was shelved as the possibility, and he came home to the warm welcome of the little black dog. Occasionally he would talk to her as he smoked his cigar.

"I thought I had him to-day," he would observe, "but it was another guy. Anyway, I can wait. The longer I wait the carelesser he gets—see?"

The little Aberdeen wagged her tail and showed her teeth. She didn't see, but she quite agreed.

"I'll get him yet."

She put her forefeet on the edge of the sofa, swinging her tail emphatically. Sure he would get him! He'd get anybody in the world.

She gave a light spring and was in his lap. He shifted his paper so as not to disturb her. Ancient Mary O'Brien, coming into the room to dust, permitted herself to criticize.

"Anybody would think that was your wife," she cackled in shrill humor.

"Hey?"

"Anybody would think that was your wife. Tee-hee! Tee-hee!"

"Listen, woman; they ain't no wife can come up to this dog."

"We'll get him," he soliloquized. "And then—and then—" He wasn't quite sure, but somehow an age of milk and honey would date from that epoch—for him and for the little dog.

THEN suddenly the bomb burst at headquarters. The chief sent for him.

"The Gonof is in London," he announced. "Go and bring him in."

"I'll bring him in."

"And listen, Denihan; remember this: When the Gonof is got, he goes to the chair on account of that scrap in Grand Central. Nothing can save him. And he knows it."

"I'll bring him."

"The Gonof can take every chance in the world, and you can take none. He's as bad off as he can be, so killing another copper don't mean anything in his young life. See? You can start on the first boat."

"Just a minute, Chief——"

"What's troubling you?"

"Oh, nothing. I—just— Oh, nothing at all——"

At the steamship offices, he came to the point abruptly.

"What do I do about a dog?"

"How do you mean?"

"Bringing my dog with me?"

"You've got to get a permit from the Board of Agriculture in London to bring a dog into England."

"That's bunk."

"We can't take a dog aboard until you have it."

"How long does it take to get one?"

"About three weeks—maybe five."

"I'll see the British consul. He'll gi me one."

"I don't think he can."

"Sure he can!"

The British representative he approached with dignified secrecy. He told of his plans, got some information about Scotland Yard which he had already, but to which he listened with a show of interest. Suddenly he sprung his request.

"Now, about my little dog—I want to bring my little dog with me."

"I'm afraid you can't unless you've got a permit."

"Couldn't you fix that up for me?"

"You've got to get it from London."

"Ah, go on—you can fix that up for me."

"Sorry."

"Now, wait till I tell you. This little dog—see? I picks her up, and it ain't got a friend in the world but me. Honest to God, I could tell you stories about that dog. You ought to hear her cry when anything keeps me from home. Honest to God, she'd break her heart. You don't know this dog."

"I'm sorry, Sergeant, but the law is very strict. We're fearfully afraid of rabies."

"But this dog ain't got no rabies or nothing. She's just a little black dog."

"Yes, I know; but——"

"Do me a favor, now. Couldn't you?"

"I'm dreadfully sorry, Sergeant."

"I'd be under big obligations to you if you could only do me that personal favor. Supposing one of these Scotland Yard guys got stuck about something in New York. I'd help him—away out of my work and everything. I'd help him. Gee! There's nothing I wouldn't do for him. Just let me bring along my little black dog."

"You'll only be away for six weeks—hardly that."

"Yeah; but you don't know this dog. Honest to God, you got no idea! I tell you something. This is a little female dog, you know, and twice a year we got to coop her up. I send her to the vet's—that's what I do. Honest to God, it's a shame! She just trembles and pines. I go to see her twice a day when she's there, but even at that she pines—see? And when she comes back she's thin as a rail. And she ain't herself for weeks. She ain't got nobody but me—see? And if I was away, she'd be dead in a week—see? There's no way o' telling her it's all right. I'd be back. She'd think I was gone for good. She'd think I'd laid down on her—see? Sure you can fix it up. Just one little black dog."

"Sorry, Sergeant. It's the law."

"You can't do anything for me?"

"You know yourself, as an officer of the law, that it must be regarded."

"Well, that's a bum law," said Denihan.

"Yeah," he said outside on the pavement. "That's a bum law. T'hell with a law as bum at that. T'hell with all of you," he said.

He went slowly back to headquarters, made his way to the chief's office.

"I been thinking, Commissioner, maybe you'd better send somebody else over for Red."

"What?"

"You better send somebody else."

"I thought you always wanted to get this man, Denihan."

"Yeah; but——"

"Listen, Denihan; let two of you go. How about it?"

"Oh, it ain't that." The detective's face flushed at the implication of fear. "It's just this, Chief: I get sick on a boat. I get sicker 'n a dog. When I was going down to Florida last year, I got awful sick. I wouldn't 'a' minded if the boat had gone down, I was that sick. Yeah; you better send somebody else."

"And yet, Denihan"—the commissioner's eye was very cold—"once you used to be on the river-patrol. You didn't get sick then."

"No. This seems to have come on me late in life."

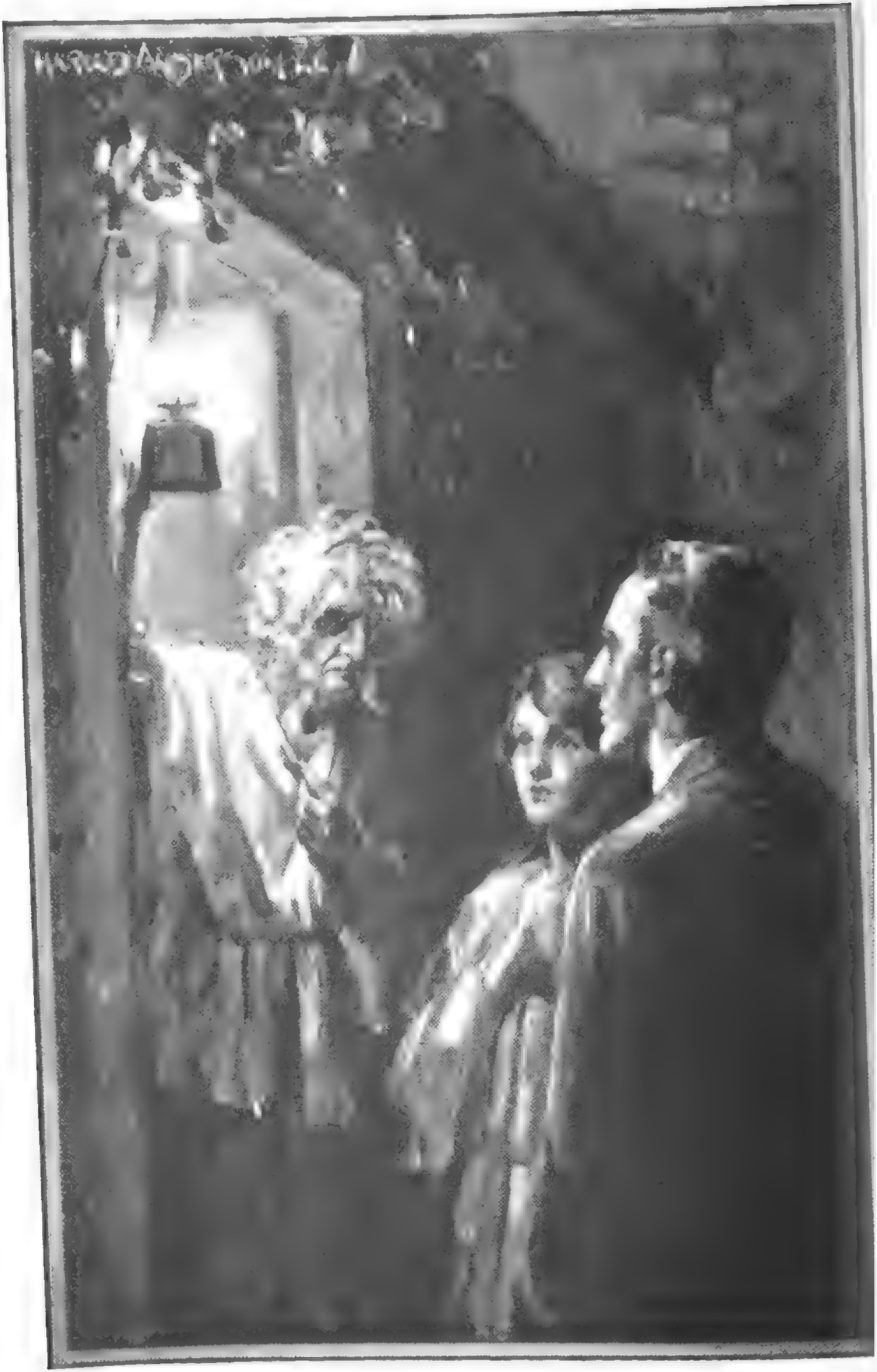
"Think it over, Denihan."

"Honest to God, Chief, I'd rather turn in my shield than go on the boat."

"Very well. Send in young McCarthy as you go out."

"WHAT do you say"—he lifted the pup to his lap—"what do you say we go to the country and live, hey? And we take old Mary O'Brien with us to cook? She comes from the country in Ireland—Dublin or Belfast or some place. And we take a place near the water—hey? Where you and I can go fishing—hey? I wonder if you can swim, or maybe it's only them water-spaniels can swim. Maybe we can teach you to swim. And maybe you want to raise a family—hey? I don't know but maybe you'd like a family. Well, we'll see. We'll sell this house to that sap up-stairs and go out into the country—hey? You and me—hey? And we'll take old Mary O'Brien. And maybe we get us a real-estate business or something. Or a garage or something. What do you say—hey? Are you on? All right; let's go!"

Everybody's Magazine, September, 1922



A woman, holding a lamp above her head, thrust her face into the opening. "Who's there? Wh you want?" "Sammy," Jones snapped. "He ain't yere."

For That Army of Normal Human Beings Who Like Mystery Stories

THE SOUL-SCAR

Natalie, Searching for Murder Clues, Has Some Surprising Adventures, and Miss Merilda, Trying to Solve the One Pine Inn Mystery, Ends by Becoming One Herself

By Beldon Duff

Author of "Twenty-four Hours"

Illustrations by Harold Anderson

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

A LOVE of mystery and a seeking for adventure—that was what brought Miss Merilda Tillinghast and her unwilling niece, Natalie Mallinson, to the One Pine Inn at Mink Harbor. "A bird-bath with a mystery" was one of its attractions according to the inn booklet. And Natalie was quite convinced that they were in for something when she recognized in Jones, the clerk, a strange, violent-tempered creature she had met on a Pacific liner five years before, on which voyage he had killed a coolie. A soul-scar, he said he had. Now he was warning her and her aunt to leave the inn—the house was all wrong, he said.

But Miss Merilda sensed thrilling possibilities in the *entourage* and refused to budge. She had seen a white hand reach out through the half-opened door of an unnumbered room and draw in a loaded tea-tray that had been deposited in the hall outside. There was certainly something very strange, too, about Miss Pringle, the proprietress, who told her that no one was allowed on the top floor. And there was Tillie, the Swedish cook, who was a circus rider, vaudeville performer or something like that. Why did Miss Pringle employ that good-for-nothing Bill for a chauffeur—with his invalid brother? What was weak-witted Sammy Todd, who had frightened Natalie so in the woods that first day, doing there?

On the second day a violent storm drove many automobile parties to the inn for the night and the next day—among them a fashionably dressed woman who had the air of a princess and was in the company of a foreigner, evidently an Italian. The woman knew Jones. Natalie heard him say to her savagely,

"You will—if it's the last act of your life and mine!"

And then, at nearly three on the fourth morning, investigating a noise in the hall, she saw Jones in the bathroom with a blood-stained towel in his hand. He had cut himself shaving, he said. A queer hour to shave, Natalie thought. It was daylight when the sound of voices on the lawn wakened her. She looked from the window. Out there in an old horse-trough—the advertised "bird-bath with a mystery"—lay the body of the "princess-woman."

The sight of the bird-bath and what it held drove Natalie from the window with both hands clutched over the pit of her stomach. When, finally, she dared trust herself to make the journey to Miss Merilda's room, she found her aunt perched on one end of the wardrobe-trunk, the casement at her elbow flung wide. The volatile little old lady swayed back and forth in a frenzy of excitement.

"Natalie," she cried, "it's happened!" And, as the girl clutched at the bed-post: "Don't faint! Every minute's precious. I haven't time to pick you up. I'm getting this right from the start—in detail. Think of the investigation—the newspapers—the way we're all coming in for publicity! Newport to Seattle—every tongue wagging. My sixth sense was right after all. An adventure I came for, and an adventure I have found!"

"What *will* they do now?"

"Do? Do? Why find the murderer, of course. We'll all be put through a third degree, and then they'll start to look for clues — burnt match-stubs — cigar-ash — blood stains and——"

Natalie was startled to see how pale was the face that stared back at her from the oval mirror hung above the bureau.

"Blood-stains!" she echoed. The towel—the handkerchief—Jones! This, then, was what had brought the clerk of the One Pine Inn to the bathroom at ten minutes to three!

The "princess-woman" was another victim of the soul-scar!

WITH a burning desire to get away from Miss Merilda's incessant chatter, to escape from the whole horrible business, she turned and ran, but only to find herself once more in the thick of it.

Miss Pringle, her eyes red with weeping, was agonizing in the middle of the lower hall.

"It never happened before. What does one do when a person dies on the front lawn? What does one do? I can't seem to think straight."

"What about her people?" some one asked. "Who was she? Where did she come from?"

Instantly there was a murmur—the mob-murmur, not to be denied.

"Yes—her name—what was it—tell us her name!"

Miss Pringle passed one thin hand over the other—back—over again. Her manner was cringing, conciliatory. The One Pine Inn was not a hotel. No one had thought to get names and addresses. A deplorable oversight. She would always blame herself——

"What's the good of that now?" broke in a little man, a boss plumber by trade who had come with his Ford, his wife, two children and a mother-in-law the night of the storm. "Are we going to stand here all day talking and"—a gulp—"her out there? I say we carry her up and lay her decent on her bed."

With the squeaky desperation of a cornered mouse, Miss Pringle turned on the speaker.

"No, no! You mustn't do any such thing. Jones told me nothing was to be touched."

"Jones? Jones?" Mr. Wattles, the pompous old gentleman who had done so much talking the night before at the concert, bustled forward. "What's Jones got to say about it?"

"Why"—the hands again began their furtive, uneasy twisting—"it was Jones who found it—her—this morning, when he was opening up the house. He's gone to Lakeport for the coroner."

"Gone to Lakeport, has he?" The old gentleman turned to the others with the triumphant air of a prosecuting attorney addressing a jury. "And how do you know, my dear madam, that this Jones person has not taken the opportunity you so kindly gave him and made his escape?"

A bowl of wild flowers crashed from the newel-post to the floor, focusing the attention of every one upon Natalie. But, as quickly, the voice of Mr. Wattles herded it back to Jones again.

"You should have consulted one of us—myself—before you let any one leave this house. Your clerk is probably not only the murderer but a common thief as well. He has taken with him the two automobile-rugs which I entrusted to his keeping—valuable rugs. I have investigated. They're gone!"

"How unfair!" Natalie darted down the last two steps.

"Unfair?" Mr. Wattles swung about. "And what, if I may ask, is your reason for coming to the defense of this man?"

The others crowded forward, nodding. The point was well taken.

"Oh—you, you impossible people! Just because he isn't here to defend himself, you turn against him. Why don't you wait, give him the benefit of the doubt?"

"Now, see here—I don't have to wait. I'm not in the habit of making statements I can't back up. You come with me to the office and I'll show you where those rugs were put——"

"Ah, quit beefin' about yer old rugs!" Bill intruded himself into the conversation. "If Jones swiped 'em, they're gone, ain't they? If he didn't, they'll turn up. You might as well do what the lady says and rest your hands and face till he's had time to get to Lakeport and back."

As the purple-necked Mr. Wattles, still mumbling about thieves and murderers, turned reluctantly from the office, Natalie had an inspiration.

"What about the man who came with this woman?" she demanded. "What has he to say for himself? Where is he?"

A moment of blankness while the idea seeped in—an eager stir of comprehension. The hunt was on! Young and old scurried to the floor above. An ear-splitting yelping from the Pomeranians—a slamming of doors—a temporary lull. Then Bill's surly question:

"What you want to start 'em tearin' all over the place for?" And, as the sound of footsteps told of renewed activity: "They won't find nothin'. That bird's wise. He's flew!"

Hope came to Natalie. If this woman's companion had run away, didn't it prove that he was guilty?

When Mr. Wattles panted back at the head of his disappointed followers, she was not surprised to hear Bill pooh-pooh a proposed search of the barn and outbuildings.

The hunters, however, were not to be so easily deterred, and the chauffeur, with a bad grace, finally yielded, growling that if it *had* to be done, he would go do it himself.

Once more the sounds of pursuit trailed off into faint, distant echoes. She welcomed the respite, knowing it would give her opportunity to look the situation squarely in the face—to adjust her mind to the possibility that Jones *was* the murderer.

"What's the idea?" she demanded of Miss Merilda, five minutes later, as that lady beamed upon her from underneath a freshly laundered counterpane. "Getting back into bed with your clothes on!"

"Say no more, my dear. You little realize the importance of every minute. The unnumbered room will soon be vacant. They—" The rest was whispered through half-closed lips.

"What? The person in this room? Do you believe that?" Natalie flinched at the note of eagerness in her own voice.

"My dear, I *know* it. But it's going to be covered up. They're only waiting for the clerk. He seems to be the chief conspirator."

"What do you mean?" The eagerness changed to anxiety.

"I heard Miss Pringle say to Tillie: 'Yes; it's terrible, but we've got to. By night the police will have searched the house. If Jones is willing to do it—' I didn't catch the rest."

"If Jones is willing to do what?"

"Make away with the creature they've been hiding—choke it—chloroform it—drown it—how should I know the exact method?"

"Oh, bosh! He wouldn't dare. Even if they *are* dealing with a murderer, it would mean state prison."

"You don't have to tell me that, and you wouldn't have to tell it to Miss Pringle. She knows the risk she's running. I'm a pretty good judge of character, Natalie—and that woman got on my nerves from the start. There isn't much she'll stop at. This poor unfortunate is a crazy relative, probably—some one she's always had on her hands. Way out here, and with a man like this clerk to help her, she can get rid of him now and no one'll be the wiser.

Natalie's hand plead for silence.

"You're wrong," she said. "It was the man who came with the princess-woman. He's run away."

"Oh, has he?" Her aunt looked crestfallen, and then, brightening: "How do you know he's run away? Perhaps he's been murdered, too, and his body hidden somewhere?" She drummed a moment on the counterpane. "They came in a car. He'd go in a car. Is their car in the barn? Has any one looked?"

"Aunt Merilda, what idiots we've all been!" The girl was on her feet in an instant.

THERE were a number of cars, more than the rickety old floor could stand with safety; but only one sedan, a 1922 model, maroon in color. As Natalie opened the door, she noticed an odd, cryptic hieroglyphic that looked like an irregular triangle in a circle. The interior, luxuriously upholstered and fitted with every trifle an extravagant woman could desire, fairly shrieked of its late owner. Under the driver's seat a bit of white attracted the girl's eye. She plucked at it, but it held. And, lifting the cushion, she saw an odd, nobby bundle of something wrapped in a blood-stained handkerchief.

With a sense of calamity, she lifted it and let the contents pour out on the floor of the car. Diamonds! Diamonds set in rings, in pins, in bracelets, in platinum squares on a strip of black velvet! A tempting fortune—enough to buy immunity in any one of a dozen cities!

An embroidered "J"—overelaborate, not the sort a man of breeding would have aspired to—jeered at her from one of the hemstitched corners. She plunged her hands into the heap of jewels and let them slip, one by one, through her fingers—a glittering cascade—back to where she had found them, back to that incriminating square of linen.

With no definite idea as to her next move, she knotted the four corners securely. The blood stains sickened her. Covering them with her own handkerchief, she stuffed the bundle into her blouse, stepped off the running-board and sidled along the narrow space next to the wall. As she came to the back of the car, she paused. The license-number had been torn from its place; a bit of wire ring still clung in the hole. The murderer had not been pressed for time. His tracks had been covered. He meant to return for the jewels.

THE shuffling sound of steps on the loose planks outside set her heart to thudding. The last thing she wanted was to be caught in her present position. So, seizing a rung of the ladder to the hay-loft, she drew herself up.

"Hey, miss! What you doin' there?"

It was the chauffeur's face that stared up at her, a blur of white in the twilight haze of the barn. She could have sworn he was trembling. Easing herself back to the floor, she eyed him curiously.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "You look as though you'd seen a ghost."

"Mebbe I did, and mebbe I didn't." Bill shrugged non-committal shoulders. "Ain't they walkin' to-day?"

Drawing her sweater over her blouse to cover the suspicious bulge, Natalie edged away.

"Who took the license-number off that car?"

Bill stepped aside to let her pass.

"You got me," he said. "First time I seen it was gone."

"Did you happen to notice what state it was from?"

"Cars come so fast I just wedged 'em in. Never thought to look 'em over."

Obviously, Bill was not going to be communicative. She retraced her steps to the house. What to do with her find she had no idea. It must be turned over to some one. But to whom? Every one was a potential murderer, or the accomplice of one. Would it be right for her to say nothing until the authorities arrived? The jewels would be as safe in her keeping as in the car. Convinced by her own arguments, she looked about for a hiding-place. The only logical one was her trunk; but it was *too* logical. A thief always thought of a trunk; it was like a safe—made to be burgled. No better spot suggesting itself, she slipped the bundle under her mattress toward the foot of the bed.

Miss Merilda's remarks about the police still troubled her. In an hour, in less than an hour, perhaps, officials would be here—men with warrants and badges to take possession of every part of the house. The guests would be guests no longer, but prisoners. This was probably the last opportunity she would have to discover the identity of either of the mysterious guests—to find out Jones' connection with the woman whose death had put a fortune in his hands.

For, with the finding of the jewels, the girl's last hope had died. She was convinced as to the identity of the murderer.

Crossing the hall, she entered the room that had been occupied by the princess-woman. The dogs had gone. She was glad of that. Otherwise, their barking would have betrayed her presence. Here again was the expression of exotic taste—gold-mounted brushes, bottles of expensive perfume, rouge, a lip-stick in a jeweled case, a satin negligee lying over the back of a chair.

Picking up the shimmering folds, she

searched for some label or initial; but even the maker's name had been ripped away. She turned to the suitcase, half open on a chair. It was in wild confusion. Every article had been gone over, marks removed carelessly—as with a knife.

On her knees before it, she tried to think. No woman, however anxious to hide her identity, would have treated the dainty contents with such barbarism.

She folded the garments one by one, all unconscious that this very confusion might be of vital significance to the police. Even the bureau came in for a share of her attention—the while she tried in a vague way to imagine the feelings of the occupant of the room when she had handled these objects for the last time. Had she any idea of the fate toward which she was moving?

An interlude of twenty minutes, and Natalie faced a new problem. Her own room was in the same confusion as the one she had just left. The lock of her trunk had been forced, her treasured possessions scattered about the floor—the bureau and washstand dismantled. At least, here was one thing that could not be laid to Jones—this work of a madman. There was nothing here to attract—she stopped. Then rushed to her bed. But even before she thrust her hand under the mattress, she knew the truth. The jewels were gone!

The room, all at once, grew stifling. As she groped toward the window, she heard Miss Pringle's voice, a little more unctuous than usual, placating, plaintive.

"Just as you say—just as you say, Jones. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. Tell Mr. Burby I'll be right down."

So—so he had returned—returned in time to regain his loot! Well, let him have it—let him go on destroying everything—everybody— It could make no difference to her. Thank God for that!

She dug her knuckles into her eyes and hated herself with all her young might when she found that the eyes were wet——

What was that standing before the door of the house?

A fumbling search through empty pockets—the sleeve of a sweater doing service for the missing handkerchief. Ah, that was better—she could see now—it was a jitney. In it, a small man in a gray duster, his face hidden by an overpowering Panama. But the thing that nearly proved Natalie's total undoing was a sandy patch of chin-whiskers that worked vigorously and rhythmically up and down for all the world like the grass girdle on a hula-hula girl down at Coney Island.

MR. BURBY, a man of few habits and an almost feminine sense of personal cleanliness, was deacon in the Methodist Episcopal Church, proprietor of the hardware store, high exalted grand ruler of the order of Elks, a veterinary of no mean repute and last, but not least, coroner of Osega County. In his three years of office, there had been no murders in that peaceful community, and he was just as distressed, just as inexperienced and just as timid at the thought of what was ahead of him as any of the guests at the One Pine Inn. After a few words with Miss Pringle, he clambered out of the jitney and walked soberly across the lawn to the bird-bath. Jones followed at his heels. For a moment the little man waited. Then, with a reverent hand, drew aside the sheet and looked into the depths of the horse-trough.

As he put question after question to the impassive clerk, the latter, with arms folded, head bent, stared down at the thing that had once been so full of life, so conscious of its power.

Whatever the questions, Jones' answers were mere nods or shakes of the head, and at last the coroner, with every possible sign of repugnance, stooped and made a more thorough examination of the body.

Natalie, whose one desire was to blot out the clerk's image—to tear him from her thoughts—to forget that she had ever seen him—sought her aunt. That lady, however, had already discovered what was going on, and was once more in her conning-tower on the wardrobe-trunk. No move escaped her. Now and then she reported progress.

"He's finished. They're lifting her out of the tub—the man and Bill. If you please, Jones wouldn't touch her—looked as though he'd faint when they asked him—silly for a big, overgrown thing like that to go on so!"

The slow tramp of feet on the narrow stairway told of the burden that was being carried up. Even Miss Merilda was subdued for a moment; but as the steps passed down the corridor, she turned on her niece.

"Why, Natalie, how queer you look! I declare you're green! It's the water in this place. I'm always afraid of wells. You never can tell what kind of germ you'll get with your meals. And, speaking of meals, when do we eat? I haven't had a thing since eight-thirty."

The appearance of a waitress with a tray speedily answered the question.

The girl was a stranger to Natalie—one of Miss Pringle's kaleidoscopic corps of domestics that came and went with such disconcerting frequency. She bobbed with quaint deference as she set her burden on a chair by the bed and looked with something approaching awe at the city folk.

"Huh"—this from Miss Merilda—"you're back again, are you? What's the matter with Tillie?" And, tucking her napkin under her chin, "I suppose she's on duty in the room up-stairs." The girl bobbed again. "Well—what are you waiting for? I don't need you any longer." Miss Merilda waved dismissal.

The little waitress murmured a scared "Thank you" and backed away from the bed into a chair.

"Be careful. Why don't you—" A blank pause.

The girl, with a stealthy look in Natalie's direction, had screwed her face into a warning grimace and closed one eye. The next instant she was gone.

AT TWO O'CLOCK came the coroner's order—every one in the house was to go to the living-room.

Natalie prepared to obey the summons, but Miss Merilda merely entrenched herself more securely among her pillows.

"No"—in answer to her niece's query—"if he wants to see me, he'll come up here."

"Aunt Merilda, you're batty! When this man finds out what you are up to, he'll be wild. It's one thing to get the better of a woman like Miss Pringle, but the police are different. Besides, you'll discover a great deal more down-stairs than in this poky room."

Miss Merilda sniffed.

"You don't know all I *have* discovered. Oh, go on"—as her niece hesitated—"go on down with the rest of the sheep. You don't have to believe me. I'm learning what it is to have my motives misunderstood."

The living-room was crowded. Even Sammy Todd was there—his back against the wall, one foot tucked up like a sleeping crane's, his hands idly picking at the brim of his tattered straw hat.

Mr. Burby found it difficult to begin. After a few remarks on the sad duties of his office, the necessity of finding who had committed the crime, if crime it had been, he seated himself at a table in the center of the room and rapped for order. The boss plumber, who had been dozing in an armchair with a handkerchief over his face, started guiltily, and from the back of the room came a faint, half-suppressed snicker.

The idea that any one could find amusement at such a time caused a general craning of necks. Sammy Todd, drawing farther into his corner, shuffled uneasily.

Mr. Burby ignored the interruption and, turning to Jones, asked him to describe the finding of the body.

The woman, the clerk said, had come the first night of the storm in company with a man, evidently a foreigner. They had asked for and been assigned to rooms on the first sleeping-floor. A private bath was impossible, the place being but poorly equipped in that respect. The dogs, however, against the rule of the house, had been permitted to sleep in the room with their mistress. No names had been given by any of the One Pine Inn's unexpected guests. That morning, on getting up at five o'clock, he had noticed the trampled condition of the lawn about the bird-bath and, going over to investigate, had found the body.

Miss Pringle, who was next called, contributed a halting and incoherent corroboration of the clerk's statement. Then, one by one, the guests acquitted themselves creditably or otherwise, each according to his ability. The help, more terrified, less anxious to testify, came next, the aggressive Bill, grown suddenly diffident, dropping his gruff voice to a barely audible whisper. Not until Tillie was called upon did anything new develop.

The Swedish woman rose and looked about her significantly.

"Ah bane Tillie, cook," she announced, "and I got something I should tell. Villum here, he say youst now—ven he get oop this morning. How can he get oop ven he no lie down all night?"

"What do you mean?" Mr. Burby, irritated by the excited murmurs from all sides, rapped sharply on the table.

"I'll tell you what she means, Judge."

Bill, too, had risen. "I didn't sleep in my room last night. I stayed out in the bowlin'-alley with m'kid brother. He's took bad." And then, swinging in lightning retaliation on his accuser: "You better shut your trap; I can tell a few things, too. That husband of yours was down at the landin' all day yesterday, bustin' things wide open. If he finds out where you are, he'll see to it that——"

Tillie drowned the rest.

"Excuse, mister"—snapping her fingers at the coroner—"excuse. It all bane one big lie. My Ole he stay by theeater. He got goot yob fightin' Jack Dempsey."

"Jack Dempsey me eye! Some——"

Jones jumped to his feet.

"What's all this got to do with the case? You're confusing Mr. Burby, Bill." Natalie caught the look of warning that the clerk flashed at the belligerent chauffeur.

Except for venting her personal spite, Tillie appeared to have nothing else to say, and was dismissed.

Bill, however, was not so lucky. The coroner's attention had been focused upon him. A few questions brought out the fact that he had done his bit of time. And even Miss Pringle's assurances that the thefts had been committed because of pressing necessity did little to remove the bad impression which had been made in every one's mind. There was, to be sure, a stir of sympathy as she pictured the devotion of the older brother for the younger. But the sympathy was all for John—not Bill; and even that waned when she admitted under cross-examination that, but for her pleading, the priest in the mission would have had John committed to the reform school.

Having squeezed the Bill-John idea dry, Mr. Burby consulted the list on the table.

"Miss Natalie Mallinson!"

It had come! Squaring her shoulders, she rose. Mr. Burby smiled encouragingly. A pretty face was a welcome novelty.

"I hear, Miss Mallinson, that you talked to this woman. Would you mind telling the nature of that conversation?"

Natalie dried the palms of her hands and rolled her handkerchief into a limp ball.

"We spoke to each other as we passed in the hall. It was only——"

She tried to give the conversation word for word, just as it had taken place. Mr. Burby tapped his nose thoughtfully with the end of a penholder.

"Think again. Don't you remember anything, any little thing that might throw light on what happened afterward?"

"I—" Natalie began. Her lips were dry, her voice, to her own ears, a weak tremolo. "I don't know a thing. Not a thing."

The investigation concluded with a laborious address from Mr. Burby, and every one was free to go—though, he added a mild afterthought, not far. There was a general sigh of relief. The guests scattered, only to drift again into groups.

NATALIE flushed as she saw Jones; and yet intuition had told her he would be waiting when she left the room.

He stepped forward, seeming to take it for granted that she had something to say to him.

"Will you?" A jerk of the head indicated the broad veranda running along all four sides of the house. "The grounds are not forbidden as yet."

She nodded. Her voice, she felt, had not recovered sufficiently to be trusted. Outside, she tried to remember the things she must say to this man, the judicial attitude she must take. His first words startled her.

"You didn't tell. Why?" Natalie looked into eyes that had never seemed so gray, so hard, so impenetrable. "Do you believe I did this thing?" he asked. "You were sure of my guilt only a minute ago—there in that room. Why didn't you say so?" With a protesting cry she turned. But he caught her by the shoulders and drew her to him. "Answer me!" he commanded.

"I don't know why." She was trembling.

"You do! Only, you won't admit it. You're awake at last, but you are still fighting—fighting yourself—child!" The mouth that she had mistrusted had now a whimsical droop that made it almost tender. "I know how hard it is to give in," he went on. "I fought myself, for years—fought step by step—through hell. Every one believing the worst of me, every one damning me, and now you—you of all people, when I least expect it, treat me like a human being. Natalie Mallinson, don't you know, can't you see what it means to me?" He stopped. A strange expression crossed his face and he freed her abruptly. "I must be mad—as mad as all the rest of the mad people in this madhouse"—the old sidelong, twisted grin as he stepped back, leaving her path free. "Thank you for shielding me. It was corking good sportsmanship, and I hope you won't live to regret it." With a click of his heels, he faced about, his hand went up in that half-mocking, half-deferential salute and he was gone.

MEANWHILE, Mr. Burby was having his hands full. Miss Merilda Tillinghast, not satisfied with being permitted to remain undisturbed in her own room, had demanded an interview.

The summons puzzled him. He was not exactly sure whether public officials, like doctors, could visit ladies' bedrooms unchallenged, but he wasted no time in getting there.

Leaving the door discreetly open, he took a seat on the edge of the chair farthest away from the bed.

"I'm the coroner, ma'am," he announced. "You sent for me."

Miss Merilda eyed her visitor from under sharply questioning brows.

"Yes—something important," she snapped. "Shut the door." And, as he hesitated: "What are you afraid of? You're safe. When people get one foot in the grave, they've no business to act as though they were in a French farce."

The sandy fringe on Mr. Burby's chin moved up and down indignantly.

"Speak for yourself, ma'am. I'm sixty-three."

Miss Merilda plumped up her pillows.

"I'm sixty-seven, and proud of it! Now to business. Would you—" A pause, to judge his brain-capacity. "Would you like to be the one to catch this murderer?"

Like the born melodramatist that she was, Miss Merilda paused to let the thrill get across. Then, in a whisper:

"Ask Miss Pringle. She knows. He's hidden in her room."

Mr. Burby's chair slid back with a rasping sound.

"Did you bring me up here to tell me a thing like that? Just because I live in a little country town, d'ye think you can make a monkey out of me?"

"Listen to the man!" Miss Merilda pushed her boudoir-cap to the back of her head and cast her eyes upward. "As though I'd try to improve on nature!"

The coroner rose and gathered his dignity about him like a cloak.

"I regret, ma'am, my preefession is such I cannot indulge in wit and humor. Murder is a serious business. As for Miss Pringle, she's a woman of character—a woman who has been coming to these parts for years The house has been turned over to me. I've searched it from top to bottom —every room. There isn't a nook or a cranny——"

"I suppose you think you're speaking the truth, and heaven knows I hope you have searched thoroughly, but—there's so much wool over your eyes that all a person has to do is to pull and——"

Mr. Burby raised his hand.

"That will do, ma'am. I don't want to hear any more."

"Don't worry." Miss Merilda arranged the bedclothes neatly round her chin. "You're not going to. I'm through. I wouldn't point a clue out to you now if it was lying directly under your nose. Woman of character, indeed! Hm. I suppose every female has one male she can vamp. And at sixty-three a man begins to——"

The door slammed. Mr. Burby had stamped down-stairs.

Miss Merilda lay for some time staring at the ceiling—her imagination, a peculiarly juvenile imagination, busy with a new idea. Why not play the leading part? Discover the murderer? Get all the credit?

She sat up hastily and consulted her watch. It was four o'clock. Almost time for another meal. When the dining-room was full, the upper part of the house would be empty. Backing cautiously out of bed, she went to the closet and took out her wadded-silk dressing-gown and a pair of bedroom slippers.

While Miss Merilda busied herself with plans for personal aggrandizement, Natalie turned round and round in the squirrel-cage of doubt.

Her interview with Jones threw her back to her original starting-point. Was he innocent or was he guilty? One moment her suspicions seemed childish, futile. The next— Every fresh suggestion an ugly menace. A certain simplicity in his bearing —a sincerity in his tone had impressed her. And yet, if he were innocent, why not explain himself?

Remembering the flat rock where she had spent part of the morning, she climbed the hill, and choosing the point that jutted farthest toward the west, resolved to wait until sunset before going back.

The shadows from the trees grew longer. She watched them creep across the rock and slide over the edge, to emerge into the lesser shadows of the huckleberry bushes. The sight of that rusty purple thicket reminded her of Sammy Todd. What had he meant when he told her to ask Jones about the trips to Lakeport? Was it the flat package with the red string he was hinting at, or had he some other——

As though he had materialized from her thoughts, she saw the boy coming slowly up the hill on the other side. His stumbling gait spoke of weary little legs. Half-way up he slumped down and stretched out at full length on the ground. For a time he lay, his face buried in the moist, sweet grass; then, inch by inch, he dragged himself along until he was under the shelving point of rock on which she sat. She heard him burrowing like a fox in his hole. Presently he emerged and stood, all unconscious of her presence, clutching something which he now smoothed, now fondled, now held above his head with the exaltation of a religious devotee.

The red fire from the setting sun touched the outstretched hands and what they held. It was the ruby earrings of the "princess-woman!"

Natalie flung her arm across her mouth to smother a cry. The scene in the hall the night before flashed before her. Had the boy been so carried away by the glitter, the fascination of those trinkets that he had——

She shuddered, and then, with an overwhelming relief, realized what it would mean if Sammy Todd were the murderer. Jones—Jones would be free, his name cleared of suspicion!

But, oh, she must be so careful. One mistake, and she might lose the golden opportunity that chance had given her.

Leaning over the rock, she called,

"Sammy—Sammy Todd!" As the boy looked up, her hands went out to him. "Come here," she invited.

Suspicious, yet flattered, he grimaced. She patted the rock, an invitation for him to sit beside her. He was still reluctant.

"Sammy," she said, watching the tightly clenched fist. "I have something for you." She slipped off a small seal-ring and held it out. "A boy who went to France gave it to me. I want you to have it."

Though his eyes glistened, he shook his head. Posturing fantastically, he put the hand with the earrings behind him and crept cautiously toward the ring.

Instantly Natalie drew it back, just out of reach. Like a juggler holding a balancing-stick, she tilted it back and forth until the sun caught the gold and toyed with it. The boy's tongue shot out. He made a snatch—missed—snatched again. Again missed by the fraction of an inch.

"Show me what you have, and the ring is yours," Natalie promised over and over again. He was not easily caught. Her nerves were twitching before he surrendered.

The feel of the rubies was to the girl a joy such as she had never known. At that moment she believed Jones to be innocent. The evidence was only a slender thread, to be sure; but it could be—must be—made secure. Slowly she went about her questions, coaxing, bribing, cajoling, but discovering little. At last, with an inspiration born of desperation, she fastened one of the hoops into her own ear and turned, shaking her head.

"See! Do I look like her?"

With a sudden whimper, the boy backed away.

"No, no!" he cried. "Not like her! Take it off! Take it off!" A white horror seemed to fall upon him, an introspection strangely out of keeping with his former vacancy. "Do you know," he whispered, when Natalie despaired of his speaking again, "I told her she must give them to me. I told her loud, but she wouldn't. And then I took her by the neck and I——"

Before the girl realized his intention, he had snatched the earrings and, leaping from the rock, was off the way he had come.

IT WAS Bill to whom Natalie carried the story of Sammy Todd and the earrings. He happened to be the first person she met, and her heart was bursting. The chauffeur listened in moody silence. Fearing that he had misunderstood, she began again emphasizing certain points.

"Don't you understand?" she urged, "It will clear everybody else."

Bill shook his head.

"Sammy's a nut, all right," he said; "but he wouldn't hurt a fly. I know who done it. I've known right along."

"Oh!" Natalie drew back.

"Yes; I tried to tell that old fool Burby, but he wouldn't listen."

"Will you tell me?" They had reached the house, and the girl paused, her fists clenched deep down in the pockets of her sweater.

Bill hitched uncomfortably at his collar.

"Well, why not?" he said at last. "I don't owe Ole Peterson nothin'."

"Ole Peterson—Tillie's husband?" Natalie was not prepared to accept another suspect. At sight of her incredulity, Bill's surly manner returned.

"Aw—you're as bad as Burby, but—every one round the Bridgeport circus lot knows the 'Swedish Lion.' He's a killer when he's tight. Besides, he's sore at Tillie and he's sore at me."

"At you?"

"Sure!"—with a shrug. "Tillie come to the mission class with Miss Pringle, and I—well"—he looked sheepish—"she didn't say she was married, and I got to walkin' out with her, and——"

"I see—you and she became friends."

"That's one of the reasons I come up here. And then Tillie, she got Miss Pringle to bring her, too. Some crust I'll tell the world—and me just after givin' her the gate! Oh, well." He kicked off the heads of a couple of dandelions, and then: "Ole got hep, I guess. Anyway, yesterday he come off the boat at Mink Harbor all lit up like the Woolworth tower—swearin', fightin'-mad drunk—telling everybody he'd come to find his wife and bash her on the coco."

"But this other woman—why should he touch her? She had nothing to do with Tillie."

"Right you are! But when Ole once gets started, he'd hit anything that got in his way. Say; do you know *how* this dame was killed? She had all one side of her head stove in. No one but a big guy could have done it. I don't care if Sammy Todd's got fifty of her earrings. He's a little feller, not as peppy as John. It ain't in him."

Natalie nodded her head and went slowly into the house. "No one but a big guy could have done it." Jones was a big guy. Even Bill would have to admit that. Straight to the office she went.

Jones was seated behind the desk—alone. He was on his feet before she had closed the door.

"I want to talk to you," she said.

There was an eager light in his eyes as he pushed forward the only chair—his own, a rickety swivel that stood for office dignity.

BUT she preferred to stand, keeping the roll-top desk between them. This time he should hold nothing back. She would weigh every word—drag the truth from him willy-nilly.

"I have made a discovery. Perhaps you can tell me whether it is important."

"Yes?" Always the monosyllable.

"Sammy Todd has the earrings this—this woman wore."

Jones shifted his weight. His brows contracted.

"How do you know?"

"I saw them."

She hastened on with her story. To her amazement, Jones was as skeptical as Bill. He even vetoed with some heat her proposal to carry the information to the coroner.

"You'll only be laughed at. The first thing he'll say will be, 'Where are the earrings?' Without them, don't you see how fishy it all sounds?"

"No, I don't." Natalie's color was rising. "Why shouldn't he be interested? It may be a clue. You want the murderer to be found, don't you?" And then, seeing the expression on her companion's face: "Oh, why don't you tell me what you're afraid of? *Is* there some one in the room on the top floor?"

The ink-well that Jones had been fingering slipped, sprinkling the papers on the desk with black polka-dots.

"What do *you* know about that room?" Natalie hesitated. "Have you been there?" There was a sharper note with every rising inflection. "Have you?"

"No; but—" A pause with deliberate intent. "My aunt——"

Jones' fist crashed down among the ink-stained papers.

"Has she been there?"

Natalie turned her head slowly from side to side.

"No; we haven't either of us been there; but, after all, why shouldn't we be free to move about in any part of the house? Can't you see—don't you realize what all this mystery will lead to? Why not——"

"That's not a matter I care to discuss. All I can say is that you mustn't let your curiosity get the better of you. Keep away from the top floor. Stay out of this!"

Hurt, bewildered, she gave her word. And instantly Jones' manner changed.

"That's better." And, as though he would show her that he too could make concessions: "I'll see Sammy Todd when he comes over at eight o'clock with the butter and eggs, and if he still has those earrings"—his fingers clenched—"I'll get them and you can tell Mr. Burby. How does that strike you?"

Natalie would have agreed to almost anything. The interview had disturbed her more than she was willing to admit, and for the next hour her heart kept taking rapid excursions to the soles of her shoes.

The arrival of two police officers from Manchester set every one in a flutter. No one was to leave the house until after the coroner's inquest at ten-thirty the next morning. It was an order. Waitresses sniffled; guests wore an injured, more-sinned-against-than-sinning look.

Eight o'clock, and no Sammy Todd. Natalie made a dozen trips to the back porch. On the last one, instead of the small, plodding figure for which she had been waiting, a girl brushed against her. On one arm she carried a heavy basket.

Her face seemed vaguely familiar. Natalie remembered that Sammy Todd had a sister in Miss Pringle's service.

"Where's your brother?" she asked, forgetting she had meant to be cautious in her inquiries.

The country girl turned. There was nothing amiss with the gray matter behind her smooth forehead with its widow's lock of soft brown hair.

"Sam's sick," she answered shyly.

"Isn't he coming at all? I must——"

A hand on Natalie's arm sent a warning message, and then Jones spoke in greeting to the country girl.

The eggs had been counted, the butter weighed and the girl dismissed before he addressed Natalie.

"Sammy's playing 'possum. I'll go and smoke him out of his hole."

"There just a chance"— Natalie's wits had been at work—"that he put the earrings back under the rock. Have you a pocket-flash? Let's go and look."

Jones apparently was not listening. He rang a bell at the side of his desk and gave the butter and eggs to Tillie, who carried them down to the kitchen.

"Shall we?" Natalie urged impatiently.

"We?" Jones looked down at her, a whimsical sparkle in his gray eyes. "Did you hear the order these policemen gave? No one is to leave the house. I'll go alone."

"But—I can't tell you the spot. I'll have to show you. What difference would it make to those men? We won't be gone a minute."

Jones reached into the desk and took out a small electric torch.

"Aren't you afraid?" he asked, slipping it into his pocket.

Catching a hint of that sidelong smile, she gave challenge for challenge.

"No. Are you?" And as the smile was replaced by an expression that brought the blood to her cheeks: "How can we give them the slip? You know the house better than I do."

The air was cool, tinglingly clear. Stepping from the warmth and confusion of the inn to the limitless darkness and silence of the night was like plunging blindfolded into an icy pool. A sporting instinct of fair play was driving her on this expedition. Had any other human being's reputation been at stake, she would have done the same.

Yet with every step came a growing consciousness of her companion's presence, his vitality, his crude forcefulness—his nearness. She was swept by a desire to feel the touch of his hand, the shelter of his arms. The conventions behind which her mind had always hedged itself were torn away and with them the last vestige of pretense. Let others sit in judgment. No matter what he had been, no matter what he had done, it could make no difference. She would not turn against him.

Dazed by the primitiveness of her emotions, the girl picked her way over the uneven ground to the top of the hill, to the jutting ledge of her favorite rock, and looked down at the world in its girdle of infinite space. Gradually an awe of the universe, a great peace surged up to her. Life adjusted itself to a new perspective, and with the adjustment came a wide comprehension, a deeper sympathy, a more human understanding.

She turned to the tall figure by her side, a dark blot against the dark sky. Though she could not make out his features, a strange, luminous glow lifted the shadows through which he had walked since their first meeting, and, with them, her suspicions. This monstrous crime could not be laid at his door. The interest which he had wakened in her did not have its root in anything that was base. She could not doubt him again.

The far-off whinnying of a horse broke the spell, and with it came a recollection of the errand that had brought them to such a place at such an hour. She stooped and swiftly indicated the spot where Sammy Todd had burrowed for his hidden treasure that afternoon.

Jones let himself over the rock and, pocket-flash in hand, crawled under the shelving ledge.

A few huckleberry branches screening a cache formed by a fissure in the giant boulder, a handful of dry leaves, a pile of dirt, and that was all. The ruby earrings were not there.

"The damn little fox!" Jones backed out and brushed the moist earth from his knees. "I'll go to his house. You turn back. Any moment they may miss you."

Natalie walked to the farther side of the rock and stepped down. She rebelled at the thought of being dismissed.

"Sammy Todd won't give them to *you*. Besides"—she looked up at him wistfully—"I'm afraid to go back alone."

He snapped off the torch that had guided her to him and surrounded himself with a barrage of darkness. She knew he was weighing her words and forbore to breathe, lest he decide against her.

To her relief, he made one of his abrupt, jerky movements and, turning, indicated that she was to follow him.

AN IRREGULAR mass of shadow finally loomed in their path—the farmhouse. One window, and one only, showed a light—a smoky blur in the night. Jones paused to look in, his height bringing him well above the sill. Natalie peered up anxiously, but his expression told her nothing. She saw him lift his hand.

A smart rap on the loose cl[illegible] From within a startled shifting o[illegible] a squeaking of boards, the low [illegible] whispered conversation. At last [illegible] opened grudgingly, and a woman, [illegible] a lamp above her head, thrust her [illegible] to the opening—a face incredibly [illegible] wrinkled—the pipe-smoking grand[illegible] Pushing back from her watery ey[illegible] gray veil of hair wisps, she droo[illegible] cracked, toothless whine,

"Who's there?" And, as the l[illegible] on her visitors' faces, "What you w[illegible]

"Sammy," Jones snapped.

"He ain't yere." The old crone m[illegible] if to close the door. But the cle[illegible] was half-way across the sill.

"Where is he?" To emphasize [illegible]sistence, he followed up the intrudin[illegible] "I must speak to him." He strode [illegible] strip of faded cretonne curtaining [illegible] room at the rear. Before he could r[illegible], the folds stirred and the sister appea[illegible]

"Sam's gone," she declared resentf[illegible]

Jones scowled.

"Didn't you tell me he was sick in [illegible]?"

"Yeah," she said; "but he ain't. [illegible]'s gone a-huntin' woodchuck."

"He ain't yere. He ain't yere. He[illegible]'t yere." The swaying rhythm of the gn[illegible]ed old body, the meaningless iteration, th[illegible]tle ratlike eyes were all weirdly remini[illegible]t of the weak-witted Sammy. Na[illegible]e, watching the grotesque silhouette bo[illegible]on the wall, caught the likeness.

Half-way to the gate, Jones paused.

"Hark!"

The grating of a bolt hurriedly flung into place, the grinding of chains.

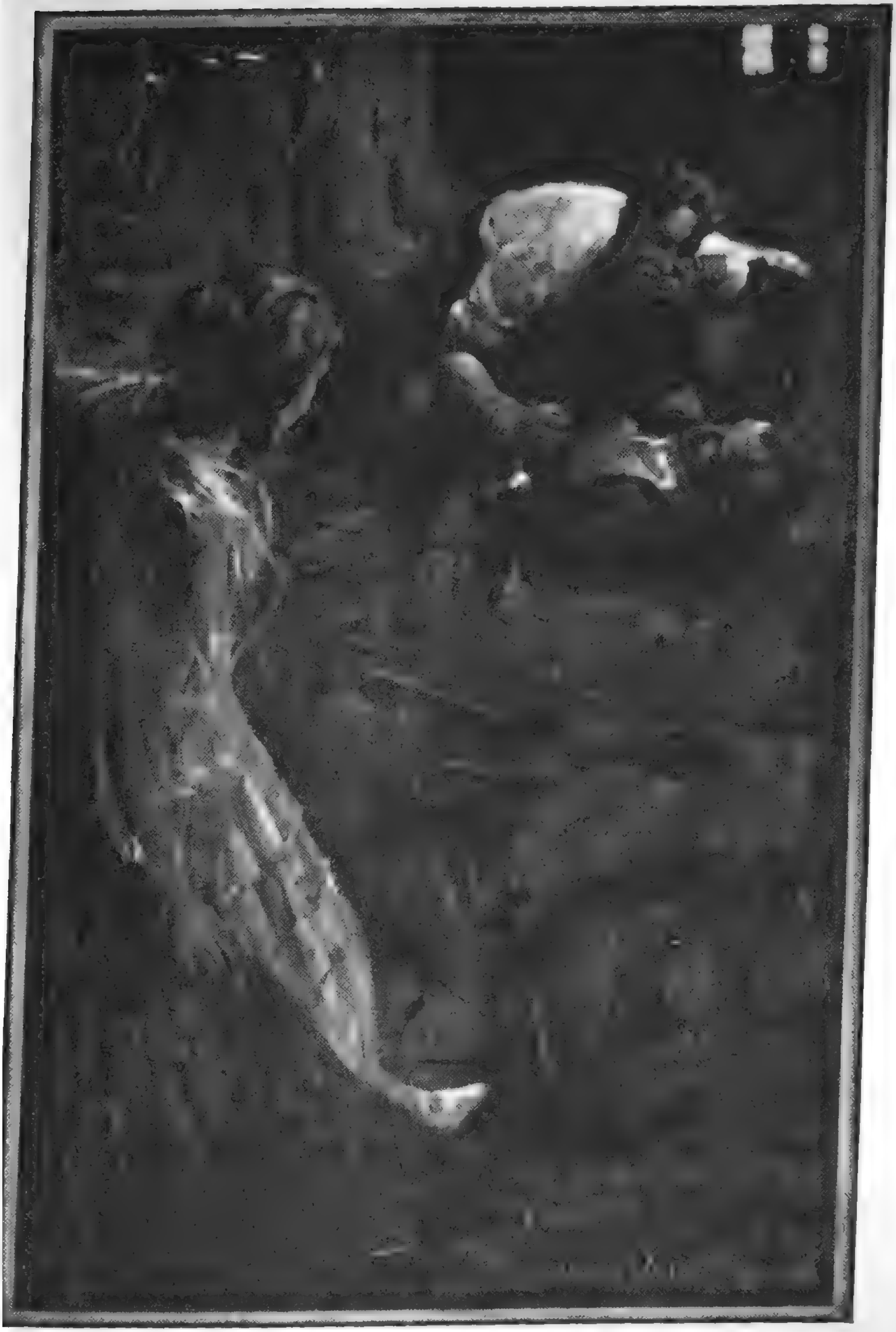
"That's to protect the boy. He *was* there. I saw him through the window. But that sister of his was smart enough to know I couldn't search the house. We'll have to wait now till morning."

They turned back. And once again silence fell between them. Not until the bowling-alley was reached did Jones speak.

"Almost moonup"—pointing to the silver haze over the tree-tops. 'This jaunt has taken longer than I thought it would. I was a fool to let you risk—" He stopped. The snapping of a twig, cracklingly clear in the sharp night air. "Who's there?"

No answer.

The clerk, motioning Natalie back, walked in the direction from which the



Together they crashed to the ground. Jones was underneath, fighting desperately.

sound had come. There was a rustling among the leaves—the grit of gravel. A bush swayed. Jones leaped forward.

Natalie lost him for a moment, but a startled grunt and the sound of scuffling told her that he had uncovered a night prowler. She flattened herself against the trunk of a giant tree as a crouching form darted out of the shadow of the bowling-alley, Jones only a pace behind.

A lunge—the sound of ripping cloth—a blow. The fugitive turned to defend himself.

With automatic precision, Jones dug his heels into the turf, at the same time bracing his shoulders. He made a short thrust with his left fist, a sledge-hammer swing with his right.

The shaggy head at which he aimed ducked. The blow glanced off harmlessly. Then came what, to the watching girl, was incomprehensible. The crouching shape straightened, gathered itself together and plunged headlong, diving for the clerk's knees. Jones wavered. Together they crashed to the ground.

Natalie would no more have thought of running away than if the fight had been her own. Dropping on all fours, she felt frantically about the roots of the tree under which she stood until her hands touched a thick pine-knot—a formidable weapon.

The rim of the moon above the hilltop showed the pair rolling over and over, squirming, panting. Those deep, sobbing breaths terrified her. If they would only shout, cry out, do anything to let off some of that bottled-up ferocity! She ran round and round them in narrowing circles, prodding first one and then the other with her stick. Jones was underneath, fighting desperately.

Fearing to strike the wrong one, she flung aside the pine-knot and ran toward the inn. A hoarse bellow, the roar of a maddened animal, stayed her.

As she looked back, the struggling mass rose, top-heavy, swaying, one pair of legs, wide-spread, supporting the whole. A twist, a shift, a glimpse of a distorted face. Slowly, painfully, a pair of arms lifted their burden. The upraised bulk developed legs and arms of its own—arms that thrashed the air in a vain effort to get a grip. For a moment it struggled, like a giant sea-spider, then was catapulted through space to strike, head on, with a resounding crash. The other figure rocked unsteadily.

Jones had come through.

And then some instinct, the animal sense that warns of danger, pulled her in the opposite direction, and she saw a third figure stealing from the barn. It was already half-way across the open space.

Her cry and the bark of an automatic sounded as one. Jones swayed, pitched headlong. The automatic barked again; the figure wheeled and made for the woods. Jones lay where he had fallen, but just when Natalie told herself that the shots had taken effect, that he was dead, he staggered to his feet, brushed a hand across his eyes and started in pursuit. A crash as he went through the underbrush, his big frame tearing everything before it. Then silence.

The last of her courage was drained.

She sank to the ground as an excited crowd in various stages of dress and undress surrounded her. The sounds of the battle had roused the inn.

"They're killing him! They're killing him!" she reiterated, in answer to frantic demands for explanation. "He's not armed." And then, because her wits had for the moment forsaken her, she could not tell them who "he" was.

IT WAS Jones himself who settled their doubts. His shirt, half torn from his back, his chest scratched and bleeding, he came out of the woods and walked uncertainly toward the group. There was a dazed expression on his face.

"Got away," he said jerkily.

"Who—where—what direction? Quick, man—details!" The two officers from Manchester, on tiptoe to be off, jostled him like hounds nosing a game-bag.

Jones pulled himself together.

"Only Sammy Todd. No use hunting. He's got clean off. Moon's made him loco. We—" Of a sudden, he flung them to right and left. "Good God, the other one! What about him? Have you made sure he won't—" He raced toward the spot where his late adversary had fallen.

The crowd fell back, infected by the panic in the clerk's manner, and let him through. The place was vacant.

"Here—here is where he landed! Look round. He can't have gone far. I tell you he was knocked out."

"What are you driving at? Who do you mean?" The detectives stared at each other in blank amazement. "Say something that means something."

Jones' fingers plowed wildly through his hair.

"How can I? I don't know who it was—what it was. All I can tell you is that something—something that can fight like hell—is loose in this ten-acre lot. We've got to find him, or no one's life will be worth a plugged nickel!"

As though stung by a sudden recollection, he searched the faces before him.

"Where—" he began, and, catching sight of Natalie: "Go straight to the house—to the house—understand? And stick by the crowd."

He turned to the others.

There was a hurried parley, a hasty formation of two parties, one offensive, the other defensive. As though by common consent, Jones joined the searchers. With him went the two detectives and the younger men, who were unwilling to miss the opportunity of big-game hunting. What was left of the crowd herded together under the leadership of Mr. Wattles, who, in a pair of orange-silk pajamas and an amazing nightcap, had just come waddling from the inn, his lighted bedroom candle still in one hand. With this small beacon held aloft, he advised an immediate return to the shelter of four walls where all windows could be locked, doors barricaded. The procession started.

Natalie, following in the wake of the others, yielded to a conviction growing steadily upon her. There *was* a wild man. Miss Merilda was right about the unnumbered room, and Jones knew it. But why had he told that deliberate lie about the quick, silent figure with its unhesitating use of a pistol? Sammy Todd would never have acted that way. And, besides, she would have recognized the boy. What had Jones hoped to gain by the evasion?

The inn was reached. There was a ludicrous stampede as the little cavalcade rushed pell-mell across the porch. The key was turned in the lock; no one remembered that Natalie Mallinson had been shut on the outside.

The girl made no attempt to force an entrance. Her thoughts were all in the strip of woods behind the bowling-alley. She dropped into a chair and waited. Now and then a hail told her that the searchers were keeping in touch with one another. But after a time these grew fainter, farther off.

The lights in the sitting-room were still lit, but if she knocked, those 'fraid-cats would all be going into spasms. And, besides, they would begin to question her again. She decided to find some other means of gaining entrance, and, remembering that the kitchen windows were never locked, she walked across the grass to the front of the house. Through one of the windows came a light. She tried the sash, and, finding it unlocked, raised it softly and threw one leg across the sill.

IT WAS at that moment that she made out the figure of a man stooping over something that looked like a large safe.

"Oh!" she gasped, and the man straightened abruptly. As he snuffed out the candle on the shelf behind him, she caught sight of his face.

"Bill," she cried, "what are you doing? Light the light. It's Miss Mallinson. They've locked me out up-stairs."

An awkward pause, the scratching of a match, and the candle-flame spurted out once more, disclosing the chauffeur.

In one hand, half behind him, he carried a plate piled high with bread and meat. So the safe was nothing but an ice-box!

Natalie laughed.

"Oh, Bill, you frightened me so! Don't go away. Stay and eat it here. I'll take a bit myself."

But Bill was not inclined to be sociable. Murmuring some excuse about his brother, he backed out.

Natalie began to wonder, as she made her way to her room, if Bill had been occupied in plundering the larder through all the rumpus, and if not, where had he been? Furthermore, what about the other one—the brother? She did not remember to have seen either one of them in that circle of excited faces that had surrounded her after the firing of the shots.

The sight of Miss Merilda's shoes laid out English-fashion, in the hope of a grooming, made her pause. Why wonder about those boys when her prying, meddling old aunt had slept through it all? Here it was, still wanting ten minutes to twelve—

a whole nightful of things had happened. In utter exhaustion of mind and body, she crept to her room and, without waiting to undress, flung herself across the bed.

AN INTERVAL, half waking, half dozing—then voices, steps on the porch. A racket in the hall below. Going to the head of the stairs, Natalie leaned far over. The searching party had returned. She saw Jones just beneath the hanging lamp, his face drawn, his broad shoulders squeezed into a sweater several sizes too small for him. He was speaking to some one on the porch outside. A moment later, the two policemen entered, dragging between them a small, stocky man with a black mustache. It was the foreigner who had come to the One Pine Inn with the "princess-woman."

She looked at her wrist-watch. The search had taken all night. Sure enough, the windows behind Jones had already turned gray. The hall lamp took on the dissipated garishness that creatures of the night always wear when the sun has risen. The stale smell of kerosene and the realization that she had not slept oppressed her. Judging by the white faces she looked down upon, there had been little sleep in the One Pine Inn that night for any one.

And yet Aunt Merilda had not been roused.

It was high time now that some one did call her. There would be no end of a row when she found all she had missed. With a determined hand, Natalie turned the knob and walked into the room.

In the soft gray light, the girl could see the chair with its neatly folded pile of clothes, the merino stockings, the arch-supporters, an affectation—Miss Merilda had tiny, high-arched feet—the bed with its——

She pulled back the curtains at the window. The bed was empty!

Miss Merilda had disappeared as completely as though she had been translated to another world.

With a sickening sense of responsibility, a fear that, absorbed in other things, she had neglected her mischievous old relative, Natalie rushed from the room and down the stairs.

"Oh!" she cried. "My aunt! Has any one seen her?"

But no one even heard her question. Every eye was fixed on a drama that was being enacted beneath the swinging lamp.

Lips set, fists clenched, the clerk of the One Pine Inn towered over the man with the black mustache—the prisoner whose capture was to have cleared up all this harrowing doubt and suspicion.

"You skunk!" The clerk's voice was low—vibrant—hardly more than a whisper. "You miserable skunk!"

The foreigner shrank back against the two officers.

"Don't let him touch me!" he pleaded. "Don't let him touch me!"

Mr. Burby, who had been catching forty winks on a shake-down in the office, staggered on the scene.

"What's all this? What's all this?" And, catching sight of the prisoner: "Oh, so you've caught him, have you? Well, about time—killing women and throwing their bodies in dirty horse-troughs!"

"No—no—no! A thousand times, no!" The Italian waved his hands in passionate expostulation. "When I leave this house last night, *cara mia*—she is alive and with *him*."

One of the officers dug into his coat pocket, drew out a pair of handcuffs and unobtrusively shifted his position so as to be next to the clerk.

"Who is this man?"—from the coroner.

The clerk nodded toward the prisoner.

"He'll tell you himself."

"I swear—I swear by all the blessed saints"—the Italian, incoherent, frenzied—"I have not harm one hair on her head. He is the one"—pointing a stubby forefinger at the tall figure in the circle of pallid lamplight. "He is the man! He say, if she leave with me, he keel——"

"You hear him, Jones?" The coroner's tone sharpened. "You realize what he is accusing you of? What have you got to say?"

Jones let the tension in his arms relax and looked at his wrists, flexing them gently, speculatively.

His lips drew back in that crooked, mirthless grin.

"What can I say? It's true!"

Is this a confession of murder from Jones—and what has become of Aunt Merilda? Read the concluding instalment of this fascinating mystery story in October EVERYBODY'S—out September 15th.

The Blessed Meek

Do You Know What the Phrase: "A Nut Comedian" Means? You'll Find Out Here; also You'll Meet a Bewitching Country Girl and a Caruso Who Sprang from a Hardware Store

By Walter De Leon

Author of "Everything Save Honor," etc.

WHEN the notice come out in *Variety* that Loony Markham was married, everybody in vaudeville said, "The poor nut!"—meaning the bride—and began looking round for some one to bet with how long the wedding-knot would stand the strain. And when they found he'd married out of the profession—the eighteen-year-old daughter of a hardware merchant in the small town where Loony was laying off that summer—you could get as good as twelve to one that before the season was over Loony would be singing that popular ballad entitled, "I Loved Her, but She's Selling Nails Again."

Loony was all right—that is, he was as right as any nut comedian ever is. A guy can't walk out in front of an audience twice a day in his street clothes without any make-up on, and for no reason at all start singing off the key, throwing his cane around, busting his hat, slipping into the footlights and purposely smashing a couple of bulbs so as to add to the noise, breaking off in the middle of a dance to describe the native habitats of the New Zealand fla-fla, that strange animal half bird, half fish, which has no feathers but flies with his gills; a guy can't go on day after day watching genteel women shrieking with unrefined laughter and college professors rolling out of their chairs into the aisle at what he's doing—and remain normal. Even if his brain was all right to begin with—which is always doubtful with nuts like Markham.

And here was an innocent, unprofessional country girl marrying up with the wildest and dippiest of all the daffydils that ever drove an audience into hysterics.

The six months' bettors collected. Everybody was sorry. Ruth Markham was as sweet and natural as a downy peach swinging in the sun. But when, in five months, Loony had treated her to neglect, intoxication, general oneryness and no money—all because he didn't understand her, or married life, or himself, and because worry to Loony meant long hours for the bartenders—a bunch of her new-made friends chipped in and brought her a ticket home and some wholesome advice in regard to asking fifty dollars a week alimony so as to make sure of getting twenty-five.

Ruth thanked them, but said she'd try it another month. During which time, trying hard to understand things and not being able to, she lost five pounds, the roses in her cheeks, a lot of pride and all of her illusions. There being nothing more except her self-respect to lose, she one day accepted the ticket, the advice and the "God bless you, girlie" of her husband's associates, and went back to the ancestral hardware and farm-implements.

Loony took it without a word of explanation or sympathy-bidding. But by the time Ruth had got her divorce-papers, he'd drunk himself right out of vaudeville.

Enter the hero—Obadiah Galahad Crummey, of Osage, Iowa—a young fellow trying to get along in the world by driving the ice-wagon for old man Perkins in the morning, and afternoons selling stoves in old man Perkins' general store.

Don't get Obadiah wrong. He was no big-city iceman, flattered and petted by beautiful women fawning for his favors. He was no gay blade blithely coffee-and-caking it from kitchen to kitchenette. He was tall and homely, sandy-haired and lanky, and old Solemnon Earnest himself had nothing on Obadiah when it came to being serious. From the parent who had wished the Galahad onto him he'd inherited an imagination and no sense of humor. The rest of him was just plain rube.

DOC RYAN, of the booking-office, on a pleasure trip, turned over an asthmatic carbureter to the proprietor of the Osage Garage for diagnosis and treatment and wandered mournfully out to cuss the town. Strains of religious music reached him. Doc knew a voice when he heard one, and a clear, clean tenor was pouring out into the night through an imitation stained-glass memorial window of the M. E. Church.

"Excuse me; who's the lad with the tenor voice?" Doc asked Mrs. Turnbutton. Mrs. Turnbutton always accompanied her soprano daughter and sat in the back pew tatting during choir-practise.

"That's Obie Crummey," replied the lady, shuttling happily. "He works for old man Perkins—has ever since his folks died when he was a little shaver. His paw owed Perkins so much money the old man took Obie and set him to working it out. At least, that was the way it looked. He sings real nice, even if he ain't never took a lesson. You're a stranger in town, ain't you? Stopping with friends or just passing through?"

"Passing out," Doc told her.

In the silent shadows, back in the church, he listened to the boy. Crummey had no presence—no personality. He didn't know any of the tricks of putting a song across the footlights. It would take a season or two of practical experience—trouping—to teach him what to do with his hands, how to subdue his hair and how to hit a climax. But, even so, he seemed to Doc to have possibilities.

Rehearsal over, Doc introduced himself.

"D. P. Ryan, of the United booking-offices." The magic words fell—as the fellow says—like sterile seed on stony soil. "Have you ever thought of going on the stage?"

"No, sir," Obie answered, crossing his feet like a horse.

"You mean to tell me—with a voice like yours—you don't *want* to go on the stage?"

"No, sir. I've got a job."

Doc satisfied himself that he hadn't bumped into the village cut-up before continuing:

"I'd like to talk to you if you haven't any date on to-night. Are you expecting to see any of the ladies home?"

"No, sir. I—I ain't got any girl."

"Not strong for the skirts, eh?"

" 'Tain't that so much. But the girls round here—I don't know. And, anyway, I ain't making enough money to— What was it you wanted to talk to me about, mister?"

Obie's remark about money give the Doc something to work on.

Two days later, in Chicago, Louis Block, of the Orpheum Circuit, sent for Ryan.

"Doc, I wish you should help me. I need a sure-fire hokum comedy act for the anniversary bill I send out over my circuit next month. Since last season I expect Loony Markham on that bill. But I ain't got too much hair now, and he's already turned that gray."

Foxy Doc begun to get a glimmer of a scheme to combine a little pleasure with some business. He'd been one of the bunch that had helped Ruth Markham. He knew that the alimony she had coming to her would never arrive until Loony got working again—if then.

"Unless you got a good suggestion, Doc, I got an idea to hire a body-guard for that damn fool and take a chance. That's how bad I need him."

Which was the idea Doc had been flirting with.

"Listen, Louis; I know a guy can sing like an angel. No experience, but the goods. I've got an option on his services for two years. Why can't we work him into Loony's act? He could come on, feed a couple of gags to Loony and sing a song or two. But his real job will be to get Markham to the show-shop every day sober."

"It's a good idea, Doc. Even should Loony break away and blow a performance once in a while, this man you're plugging could go on and explain to the audience on account Mr. Markham not being well enough to appear with acute indigestion, he will try and oblige with a few songs while the stage-hands is setting up the next act."

"Sure! He'll be a great protection for you."

"Who's the name of this here Orville Harrold?"

"Crummey. He's an iceman."

"Well, tell him to bring his tongs and meet Loony day after to-morrow. Maybe we do business."

Block heard Obadiah sing. Then he took him up to his office and shoved a contract in front of him. Crummey looked at the salary-figure.

"You made a mistake, didn't you?" he asked. "It says 'per week.' You mean I'm to get this much money per month, don't you?"

With Doc Ryan there, Block didn't dare change the figures.

"You'll earn it," he said, and then shouted to his stenographer, "Send that loafer, Markham, in!"

"Listen, Loony; Mr. Crummey has kindly consented to help you in the act."

Loony looked at Obie in his Sunday black suit and yellow shoes.

"You're getting me confused with the Markham that has the barn-yard act, ain't you, Mr. Block?"

"Save that stuff for Seattle and Portland," Block told him. "You didn't do so good in them towns last season. I explained everything to you yesterday—all but this." He took some contracts from a desk drawer. "Every week you're going to get paid only practically expenses. Every week till you finish my circuit, I hold out a hundred and a quarter from your salary."

"Who's going to hold you?" Loony cracked.

"Such a comic you are!" Block answered, not laughing. "Furthermore, in the contract it reads for every performance you lose, you forfeit a week's salary."

"That don't listen right to me," Loony objected. "If I miss a show, the keeper here"—pointing to Obadiah—"not me, should lose his salary for neglect of duty."

"He loses his job," Block said calmly.

"You think of everything, don't you?" Markham grinned as he reached for the contracts. "Does the body-guard horn in on my billing?"

"He does. It'll read—' "The Squirrel's Best Friend," Loony Markham, assisted by O. G. Crummey.' "

"That's all right—if I can depend on him," Loony replied.

BEFORE his first week was out, Obadiah Galahad was longing for the ice-saws and choir-practises of Osage. He discovered he was an alien lost among strange people whose language he didn't understand any better than their habits—especially their habit of turning away and laughing every time Loony got him talking about folks and things in his home town. Obie felt so useless—until Friday after the matinée.

Markham sent him out for cigarettes. When he come back, Loony had disappeared. It was nearly eight o'clock before Obie found him, full of ninety-proof and fight. In his serious, conscientious way, Obie went to work. What with this and that and black coffee and aromatic spirits, he had The Squirrel's Best Friend ready to go on at ten-fourteen that night. The funny part was that Loony appreciated it.

Loony, however, didn't refer to the assistance he had received from Obie till the next Monday morning.

"Listen, keeper; you did me a favor last week. Now I'm going to do you one. I'm going to let you pay my alimony this week."

"You're going to what?"

"Going to let you pay my alimony. You know that little card game the Swiss acrobats and those ex-buttonhole makers in the Russian ballet held in the smoking-compartment of our sleeper last night? This morning, when I washed my face, the cleaning job was complete."

"I don't understand."

"I don't, either. I didn't know they played pinochle in Switzerland. But listen, Pythias; alimonially speaking, I'm six months in arrears. In the mail this morning was a cute letter from my ex's attorney saying that now I'm working again he sort of feels I'd răther part with a little jack than explain it to the judge."

"But I——"

"It's so simple, Adhesive. I'm broke. So, how can I send anybody any money? On the other hand, if I *don't* send twenty-five, I go to jail. Then what becomes of our act? And you?"

"But I——"

"Wait! If you don't want to accept favors from me, I'll put it another way. You're getting paid to assist me. The billing says so. I'm calling on you piteously for assistance. Don't a contract mean nothing to you?"

"But I don't know your wife," Obie remarked delicately.

"I never did. However, here is her address. The post-office is two blocks down and one over. I'm letting you get the money-order yourself, and the envelope and stamp and everything, just to prove to you that I'm not asking money for myself."

"Somehow"—Obadiah slowly scratched his hair—"somehow, it don't seem just natural. I guess maybe I'd better send it, though. She might need it. But—but when will you pay me back?"

Loony gazed at Obie with hurt, sad eyes.

"I'm surprised at you, Le Page. Aren't we going to be together, both on and off, for twenty-six weeks?"

"Yes."

"Well, any time during those twenty-six weeks that you want that money, er—ask me for it."

That same night, assisting Loony to unpack his hotel trunk, Obie picked up a photo which had slid out of a scrap-book. It was a snap-shot of Ruth in a summery dress, bareheaded and smiling.

Looking at her, Obie could smell geraniums growing in a garden, the tang of windfallen apples and the cleanness of fresh-starched gingham. "Home folks," he told himself.

"Who is she?" he asked, trying to act casual.

"The lady you sent the money to to-day."

"Gee! She's pretty! I'll bet her hair is soft."

"So's your head," growled Loony. "Listen, Coroner; put that picture in the bottom drawer with my I. O. U's and bad debts, and chase across the street to the chop-suey joint for a couple of egg sandwiches. Don't forget to ask the chink why they always put a slice of pickle in a fried-egg sandwich. He can't tell you, but insist on an answer just the same."

Obadiah walked to the trunk, stooped, pulled out the bottom drawer, saw that Loony's back was turned, slipped the photo into his pocket and walked out of the room.

The next afternoon, after three false starts, he spoke to Claudia Carson, redolent with grease-paint, perfume and warm silk, as she stood in the wings after her act. Claudia had been nicer to him—more human—than any one else on the bill.

"Excuse me, Miss Carson; could you tell me was Mis' Markham an actress?"

"If she had been, she'd 'ave gave Loony the air the first time he spoke to her. But she was a rube—nothing personal, Mr. Crummey. I mean, she wasn't wise. And that was the only fault she had in her entire system. Honest, Mr. Crummey, I ain't saying anything behind nobody's back which I haven't said in front of his face, but that marriage was a brutal crime for which Loony had ought to be shot at sunrise."

Obie, knowing Markham, and also how miserable and lonely a rube could be in a crowd of wise-cracking performers, uttered a silent, "Amen."

"It's a good thing she listened to reason and asked for alimony," Claudia went on. "There'll never be any money in that hardware store of her dad's until he wakes up and begins displaying Ford parts instead of currycombs and harness-oil."

"Does he sell stoves?" Obie asked.

"I seem to remember seeing an 1898-model oil-burner—but nobody was buying it."

With that information and the snap-shot to guide his imagination, Obadiah Galahad spend many a homesick hour creating a wonderful character—a dream of a girl that nothing in Osage had ever even approached. And after getting her all imagined perfect and marvelous and non-pareil—also in distress—what could be more natural than him falling in love with her?

Two weeks later, when Loony, with much solo conversation, led his assistant into the post-office and put a pen in his hand, Obie, without a word, obliged with the alimony.

DURING the next six weeks, Obie proved to a paying public—and himself—that it takes more than a voice to make good in vaudeville. And the other things it takes, Obie didn't have. But he had a wonderful time visiting round in the big-town hardware shops, asking questions and examining the goods on display.

In Frisco, one morning, Obie handed a letter to Markham from the stage mail-box and opened one addressed to himself in old man Perkins' handwriting. Wading through fifty-seven reasons why he should come back to work and Osage, Obie looked round for Loony. Then he called him. After that, he chased out to the sidewalk and peered up and down O'Farrell Street. No Loony.

Serious and grim as a sand-bag, Obie started the rounds of the cafés where he had previously explained to the bartenders that, when he dragged Markham out, it wasn't because he was sore on the place but merely was earning his salary. At the end of two hours he located Loony weeping softly at one end of Jim Dunn's place.

"Come on," said Obie.

"I can't work to-day." Loony choked with emotion.

"Why not?"

"Too sad."

"What happened?"

"Letter I got this morning." Loony fumbled in his pocket. "Nobody with a heart in him—not even you—could blame me after reading such a letter."

"What's sad in it?"

"Here—you read it. I can't. It's breaking my heart."

Obie stuffed the letter in his pocket and Markham into a taxi.

After a wabbly performance that afternoon, his assistant conducted the Squirrel's Best Friend to the hotel and tucked him in the sheets. Then, muffling the 'phone and pulling down the blinds, Obie sat down to enjoy a quieting smoke. Reaching for his cigarettes, he found the letter Loony had told him to read.

Mr. L. Markham.
Orpheum Theatre,
San Francisco, Cal.

Two months ago a fire broke out in daddy's store, and while trying to save his books and papers he was badly hurt.

In spite of the doctor's advice he won't let any one but me nurse him. And on account of the store being closed all this time, we are dreadfully in need of money.

You have not sent any for six weeks, but I thought perhaps if you knew the circumstances, you might send us a little. I hate to ask you this, but I honestly don't know where else to look for help.

Sincerely,
Ruth Cleary Markham.

Mr. Crummey had never heard of those old squarehead knights of the Round Table. But sitting there in that darkened room, looking at Loony sleeping it off and knowing the only thing he could be depended on for was undependability—comparing that sight with the photo of Ruth and her big trusting eyes and teasing dimples—then looking at the mental vision of anxiety and hard luck which Ruth's letter brought before him, Obadiah formed a resolve as romantic and a darn sight more practical than most of the vows for which old King Arthur made noblemen out of his roughnecks.

He unstrapped the money-belt round his waist. Six weeks, Ruth had written. Six times twenty-five was a hundred and fifty plus another twenty-five for the present week—one hundred and seventy-five dollars. The belt showed a balance of seventeen dollars. Obie had been averaging a saving of twenty-two or -three dollars a week. But he had been living high—for Obie. All he had to do was to cut out his extravagances—his ten-cent cigars and things like that—and Ruth and her daddy could be taken care of each and every week.

He looked at his watch, softly closed and locked the door from the outside, ran to the nearest telegraph office, wired a hundred and seventy-five, hurried back to the hotel and opened the door again. Markham was still dead to the world. Obie drew a long breath, rolled a cigarette and sat down, lighthearted, to wait another hour before yanking Loony in under the shower-bath.

What Obie didn't know was that before Loony had begun floating his grief he had wired Louis Block in Chicago, authorizing him to send Ruth the alimony due her, and also to forward to her twenty-five dollars each and every week thereafter from the hundred and a quarter Block was holding out of his salary.

Which gave Ruth something to think about when she started plucking two twenty-fives weekly where none had grew before. She was still undecided whether Loony was paying up his arrears or whether, when he'd wired Block, he'd been lit and had forgot doing it, when she received a letter from Claudia Carson.

Dearest Honey-bunch Ruth:

I guess you are surprised to hear from me after the long time it's been since I was up to your town that time I was waiting for the office to boost my salary which they never did. But that's neither here or there, dearie. The big news is that your

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Sad Experience is trouping on this same bill with me, and if you ain't getting your alimony regular, you ought to hire a new lawyer.

He ain't missed a show since we started, thanks to a fellow by the name of Crummey who is playing wet and dry nurse to your ex-tank. You'd like this Crummey card, dearie. He's so country. He's got a swell voice but no technic to guide it, and his hands and feet, large and sturdy as they are, seem to worry him even more than they do the audience. But he has real nice eyes; in fact, what you could call soulful eyes, dearie.

Anyway, it was Crummey last week who told me about the accident to your father and the store. I asked him how did he know, and he said you wrote it to Loony.

Well, to get down to the point, Ruthie, there's several on this bill that knows you or about you, and, one word leading to another, they all donated and asked me would I get the enclosed m.-o. and send it to you, hoping you will accept it in the spirit in which it is gave and find some use for it.

Let me hear from you soon. Am enclosing my route. With love,

CLAUDIA.

P. S. Crummey has been asking me a lot of questions about you lately, dearie, and as long as I'll talk he'll stand without tiring. That's how I noticed his eyes, listening to me talk about you. Everybody is wondering what he does with his money. He don't spend it on himself or any of the gals on *this* bill, that's a cinch. CLAUDIA.

Later, in the post-office, Monday A. M. Funny thing just happened, dearie. Crummey was writing out an application at the money-order desk when I came in. I slipped in next to him, quiet. "Ah ha, the secret is out," I says, meaning what he does with his money. He turned white as a sheet and looked scared and uncomfortable. "Don't tell nobody, please," he begged. "Loony don't know about it." "It's none of Loony's business what you do with your dough," I says; "but what's the disgrace in letting people know you're saving most of your salary every week?" "Oh," says Crummey, getting his color back, "oh, I don't know." Can you imagine, dearie? I told you he was a card.

C.

And that gave Ruth a whole lot to think about.

LOONY didn't tumble to Obie until the tour was nearly over. One afternoon, going through Obie's coat for a cigarette while his assistant was up on the stage, he found Ruth's picture and an envelope containing money-order stubs. Loony noticed that all of them were for the same amount—twenty-five dollars. Sorting them out, he found a stub for every week which had passed since Ruth's letter had reached him. Also he found a Western Union receipt for a hundred and seventy-five dollars, payable to Mrs. R. C. Markham.

Loony racked his brain trying to remember when he'd told Obie to take care of his alimony regularly. He couldn't recall doing so, and yet he figured he must have or else why would Obie have done it? The main thing, as Markham saw it, was to try to kid Crummey out of expecting him to pay back all the money Obie had sent.

"Listen, Mucilage," he said sternly, when Obie entered the dressing-room; "you've been sending my wife money, haven't you?"

Obie's eyes opened wide for a second.

"Alimony," he explained.

"No; I been sending her that. Louis Block's been taking care of it for me."

"You didn't tell me that."

"That ain't the point. The deep point I'm trying to show you is that you've got yourself and Mrs. Markham into a bad mess."

"How?"

"You—you've compromised her. All I've got to do is to prove in court that she's been accepting money from you, and the judge will relieve me of future payments."

"But—but you wouldn't do that?"

"Why not?" Loony hurried on. "I'm only twenty-nine. I'll probably live to be sixty. That's thirty-one years. Fifty-two weeks in every year makes sixteen hundred and twelve weeks. And at twenty-five dollars a week, that comes to forty thousand three hundred dollars. Who wouldn't tell the truth for forty thousand dollars?"

"But——"

"Wait! Here's the tough part. While Ruth probably don't think any more of forty thousand dollars than I do, her reputation is worth a lot more to her."

"Her reputation?"

"Of course. That's the thing you've done that's bad. If any one was to find out that she's been accepting money from you, *money I didn't know anything about*—" Loony paused, expecting Obie to call him quick and heavy. When he didn't, Markham's face went blank. But only for an instant. "Of course, not knowing anything about it, you—you can't expect me to pay you back for what you sent, can you?"

"I wasn't thinking about that," Obie returned slowly.

"That shows you're sensible. Best thing you can do is go up and explain the mistake to Mrs. Markham. Maybe she hasn't spent all the money."

But Obie wasn't listening. He was wondering if Ruth realized she had been compromised, and what she'd think of him when she found it out.

Losing a week's work because of having to jump from New Orleans to Chicago, Obie kept right on traveling, and one morning walked into Cleary's hardware emporium.

"I'm O. G. Crummey," he told Ruth's father. "I'd like to see Mrs. Markham."

"She'll be here in about ten minutes," the old gentleman told him. "Won't you set down?"

Obie looked for a place to set. There wasn't any. Brooms, pans, buckets, fly-swatters, kettles—everything was scattered around on top of everything else. A customer came in to buy a stew-pan. It took Cleary five minutes to find the right size and another five to find the cover. Obie's methodical mind was annoyed. He said,

"I used to be in the hardware business."

"You did? Where?"

"Osage, Iowa. We handled Kenosha stoves."

"They tell me they're pretty good sellers. How about it?"

TEN minutes later, when Ruth came in, Obie was so busy giving her father the benefit of his experience and travel he didn't even see her.

"My daughter Ruth. This is Mr. Crummey. He's been out acting with Markham," Cleary introduced. "He wants to see you."

Obie glanced at Ruth. Then his knees weakened and his tongue dried to the roof of his mouth. The Ruth whose image he'd been carrying round for months wasn't a marker to the exquisite, warm little Ruth who stood dimpling and shy in front of him.

"I'm happy to meet you, Mr. Crummey. Claudia Carson mentioned you in one of her letters. She—she said you had a beautiful voice."

Obie proved how beautiful it was by croaking a hoarse,

"Did she?"

"She also said, or rather from something she wrote, I—er—" Ruth stuck. Quickly she turned to her father. "May Mr. Crummey and I use the office for a few moments?"

At his nod, she led the way to a small glassed-in room at the rear of the store.

Obie followed like an ox to the slaughter. Now that he'd seen Ruth, it was harder than ever to make the explanation he more than ever wanted to make.

"Mis' Markham," he blurted, before Ruth could say anything, "I—I got awful bad news for you. I expect you're going to be awful angry. And you got a right to be. I had no business a-doing what I done."

"Perhaps you'd better start at the beginning." Ruth smiled, trying to put both of them at ease. "Wh-what have you done?"

"I been paying your alimony."

"Why?"

"Because I—I—" Obie mopped his face and plunged into the excuse he had rehearsed on the train, the excuse designed to rid Ruth of all embarrassment. "It was like this: Loony never could rememb—I mean, he was so busy and I had plenty of time, and so—so I sent it——"

"I see," Ruth interrupted. "But why did you use your own money?" she added, giving him another chance.

"Because I—the first time I sent it was once when he was broke and I wasn't, and he gave me your address. After that, it seemed like every time I spoke about you to Loony, he got drunk and made me a lot of work. And, anyway, he told me whenever I wanted the money back to—to ask him for it. So I wasn't worrying any. And, besides, it wasn't no trouble for me to go to the post-office once a week.

"Oh," said Ruth, greatly flattered, "you did it just from force of habit." Obie's eyes crossed in pain. "And now, of course, you have come for the return of your money."

"No!" protested Obie, inwardly all churned up. "That ain't what I come for at all. I come because Loony said I had compromised your reputation. I don't quite understand it myself, but if I have and you think so, why I—I—if you think I ought to marry you, I wi——"

"Oh! Oh!" Ruth interrupted in a panic. "O my Lord!" With wide, unbelieving eyes she stared at him. "I never heard of such a crazy—" Suddenly she boiled over—at Loony; but Obie got the steam. "What right has Loony to interfere in my affairs? What right has he to discuss me with—what right have you to listen to his crazy talk and take it seriously? Don't you give me credit for any sense at all? Don't you suppose I realized a mistake had been made? Don't you suppose I've known for weeks what you were doing? I haven't touched your money—not a penny of it. So how could I possibly be compromised? Of all the stupid, impossible——"

Obie reached for his hat.

"You don't need to say no more, Mis' Markham. Least said soonest mended." He started for the door.

"Wait, please!" There was apology in Ruth's voice. "I didn't mean that *you* were——"

"Oh, that's all right," Obie said stiffly. "I ain't so mad as just—just kind of disappointed."

"Disappointed!" Ruth was puzzled. "Did you think I'd——"

It was Obie's turn to boil.

"I thought you was home folks," he declared hotly. "I never expected no thanks, because I never expected you'd find out." Ruth was drinking in every syllable. "I only done it because I saw your picture, and in the picture you looked like a girl a fellow like me would like to know and be nice and friendly with and— help out of trouble—and sort of look after."

"Wh—why didn't you say that before?" Ruth whispered.

"Why didn't you act friendly instead of asking all them mean questions?" Obie demanded. "Do you suppose I enjoyed trying to explain thing so as not to hurt your feelings? Do—do you think it was any fun asking you to marry me?"

Ruth's eyes sparkled with mischief—and something else.

"Were you so afraid I'd accept you——"

"Dog-gone it!" shouted Obie. "Will you never quit asking them tom-fool questions?"

Old man Cleary opened the door and stuck his head in.

"Crummey, there's a drummer out here trying to sell me some garage door-hangers. Wish you'd look at 'em. I don't know nothing about 'em." He hobbled away.

"Yes, sir." Obie turned to the girl. "Now I'm going to ask *you* a couple of questions. Why didn't you take that money and do some good with it? Why didn't you fix up the store and buy some up-to-date stock and put it where you could find it? You're running this store like—like a couple of rubes."

"Mr. Crummey!" Ruth gasped.

"Well, you are. Makes me sick!"

The old gentleman was back at the door again. Ruth spoke quickly.

"Dad, Mr. Crummey says we're running the store like a couple of rubes."

"That fresh drummer just told me the same thing. Maybe there's something in it." He looked shrewdly at Obie for a second. "Young man, I'd like to talk business with you. I'll be back in a minute."

Followed a short silence in the office, with Ruth slyly watching Obie's excitement ebb and die. She admitted Claudia was a good judge of eyes.

"I don't imagine you'll be interested in any offer dad makes," she said demurely.

"Sure I will! I'm going to quit assisting Loony. He—he ain't treated me friendly."

"But haven't you a number of vaudeville contracts——"

"That's all right. All I've got to do is to get Loony pickled enough to miss a performance and they'll fire me. That's easy."

Ruth rose, her dimples deepening as she held out her hand.

"I'll have to go home and cook dinner now, Mr. Crummey. I'd like awfully well if you would come, too—with daddy. It will be just a plain country chicken dinner with fresh garden vegetables, but daddy says I cook dumplings and gravy like—like home folks."

Obadiah Galahad looked straight into her eyes. Then, bashfully, he took a thumbed, bent, soiled, corner-torn oblong of pasteboard from his pocket.

"Mis' Markham, would it be asking too much to give me a new picture? This one is kind of all wore out."

LATE one night, some few months later, Doc Ryan discovered Loony filling up a half-emptied high-ball glass with large, personal tears.

"What's the trouble, Loony?"

"My wife got married yesterday, and didn't invite me to the wedding." He brushed a pallid hand across his eyes. "And I've lost the best little guardian I'll ever get."

"Cheer up, Loony; I'll——"

"Cheer up? How can I—knowing they're taking their honeymoon on the money Obie sent to pay my alimony?"

A New Author's First Published Product—

Johansen

It Is Laid in China Because the Author Lived There, Studied China, and the Subject Is What It Is Because He Likes Adventure. Everybody's Will Publish More of His Stories

By James L. Hutchison

A REMARKABLE man, Johansen. Six feet three he stood, a slouchy but powerful mixture of muscle and bone, with hands and feet large, even for his huge proportions. His features were rugged, as if they were carved roughly from granite, lending his face a wooden sternness and gravity, only relieved upon rare occasions by a quizzical flash from his deep-set blue eyes, which usually were entirely hidden under his bushy brows. Most of the time he moved and acted as if in a trance; it was only in his eyes—and that seldom—that any index was given to the whimsical, fantastic nature of the man.

In his own stolid Swedish way he had come originally to Mongolia to "spread," he said, "the word of God and bring sweetness and light into the sordid lives of the natives." Whether or not he was sent by a Swedish church I do not know, but he had no connection with any mission in China or Mongolia, and what preaching he did was out of doors, "because," as he argued in his Piccadilly-Swedish accent, "I have to run them down; it is impossible to talk to them unless they are on ponies or camels. If they get off, they fall asleep. Moreover, they are a curious people and will not bear with the word of God."

Nor was Johansen backed by money from home. In the beginning he paid his way by selling Bibles—a hopeless task, it would seem. Later, however, he had become intensely interested in trading ponies with roving bands of Mongols. His success was so immediate and marked that Bible-selling was relegated to the position of avocation. Bibles are needed in every home, but few Mongols have homes, and, besides, more than a sufficient number of gods are fighting for a foothold in China and Mongolia.

I first met Johansen in Kweihuahsien on a hurried trip I made from Peking, where I had been doing an excellent business in lottery bonds, selling only to the highest officials in the city. Unfortunately, a suspicious official doubted the good faith of his bonds. It was imperative that I leave Peking, and, quietly but with despatch, I discovered the cheapest and fastest route to the border—and landed in Kweihuahsien.

Johansen, the only foreigner, received me quietly but cordially, put me up in his compound, gave me a good dinner and asked no questions. In fact, he neither asked nor answered questions. Throughout the meal he remained silent. When the boy had cleared away the dishes and finally glided from the room, I essayed to break the uncanny silence.

"Mr. Johnson—" I began.

"Jo-han-sen." It was his first word that evening. I was encouraged.

"Yes, sir—Johansen; quite right. Well, sir—I say—see here—damn it; I'm in wrong. I played a little game with Peking and she stacked the cards. When she called, I couldn't hear. And the farther away from hearing-distance for me the better. I'd appreciate advice of a friendly sort."

Complete silence—until I thought that

he was asleep. The only sound was the tick-tick of his battered old alarm-clock on the sideboard. The man made me nervous; I could not see his eyes. Finally he spoke, and I jumped a foot.

"O-oom. Ye-es. To-morrow I'm taking a yacht and a motor-car to the Living God of western Mongolia over at K'an K'al, about three thousand *li* across. We start at five; the boy will call you. Your pay will be five dollars Mex. a day; and you will obey my orders. We will have prayer and go to bed."

A CYCLE of Cathay! The East slow! Dazed and bewildered, I went to bed. That night I had confused dreams of sailing a yacht across a sea of sand. A huge Buddha of bronze sat glowering over me, and Johansen, stern and silent, sat in a Ford car perched in the bow.

Dawn of the next morning saw us well on our way. I cannot describe the beauty—the color and picturesqueness—of that caravan of sixty camels slowly winding through the pass, up, up, up until the level plateau of the desert was reached. The sun, struggling from its sleep, slanted its beams across the rolls of mountains, bathing their tops, as we mounted slowly above them, with a riot of purples and reds and browns. The stillness of great space was broken only by the slow shuffle of the camels, the tinkle of the leader-bells, now and then the hoarse yell of a Mongol to his beast, and the slow purr of the motor. There was a sense of unreality about it all.

It was curious, the quality of Johansen's conversation. He could not be forced to more than a grunt, but after days of silence suddenly he would open fire, talk steadily for an hour, then as suddenly relapse into a heavy silence. For many days he held aloof from conversation, but when two men are alone in out-of-the-way corners of the world, sooner or later they unburden their minds, ofttimes unloosing thoughts which under other conditions would remain locked in their breasts. Piecemeal Johansen told me much of curious interest. I was concerned with the Living God. Who was he? How did he happen? What did he do? Why the yacht—the motor-car?

"Why," was the reply I received in scraps—it took me several days to uncover this information—"why, he's just a little yellow man who believes so hard that he's a god that others believe it, too. His father was one before him, and his father's father. I don't know who started it. Many Mongols pay tribute to him, and I believe he's very rich. Has a temple palace crammed with priests and concubines and lives the way some think a god ought to live, although it's not exactly my idea of a god's job. It's deplorable!

"Has funny tastes, this god. Buys every sort of foreign junk he hears of and has a big godown full of fancy clocks—dozens of them—sewing-machines, stacks of mirrors, carriages, cheap jewelry, stoves, sideboards and so on.

"The first time I visited him I brought along presents of a silk hat, a pair of garters and a Bible with colored illustrations. The little fellow's been crazy about me ever since. That's a year now. He trusts me so much that he's made me his official agent for purchasing foreign truck. Gives me the run of the temple, daytime. Some nice girls he has there." And he flashed one of his quick, quizzical glances.

"This yacht," rumbled Johansen, one day, "we're packing here is his latest whim. There's a little lake in the temple grounds, and when he saw a picture of a boat in a book I had, he was miserable until he handed me seventy-five thousand dollars with orders to get one like it. Had her made in Shanghai at the Ying-Chung Engineering Works. Going to be the devil's own job to put it together again, too!

"The Ford car," he continued, with a rusty chuckle, which, starting slowly from deep inside, gathered momentum and exploded, "is my own idea. Bought it in Tientsin. The little chap will love it, for it's the oddest toy I've brought him yet. He certainly will be surprised."

He was silent for half an hour; then, as if he had spoken only a moment before, he chuckled again.

"He certainly will be surprised. See here"—he turned toward me, shot up his eyebrows and gave me a glance of startling intentness from his keen blue eyes—"you're a pretty good sort. Mind you, I don't approve of you altogether; you might do well to read the Bible more and contemplate the wonders of God. But you work and keep your mouth shut. You're going to help me abduct the girl, and I'll pay you well."

"What girl?" I was too surprised; I could not help it.

"Shut up," he reproved calmly, "and don't argue. She's the number-one concubine of the Living God. She's the daughter of a shoemaker in Kweihuahsien. The god would have her, and the girls he wants he takes, for it's an honor to the girls and their families.

"But she had seen the grace of God, and it's not good that she stay with him. Her name is Li. She loves me, and I shall take her away. You will help me. For she's fair to the eye, and the spirit of the Lord abides within her. Besides," he added simply, as an afterthought, "I love her, and we shall be married."

As he proceeded to unfold his plan, my eyes must have grown to the size of dollars. I could have fallen on his neck and embraced him. Here was a man!

ONLY one incident worth recording happened on our journey to K'an K'al. When we were about the distance of a week from the city, we sighted a band of *hung hu tze*—"redbeards," they call these highwaymen—who, at a distance, circled round our sides and front and fired a few warning shots. With guns leveled they rode cautiously toward us, but stopped uncertainly at the sound of the motor punctuating the stillness.

I was excited—more, I was thoroughly alarmed—and thoughtlessly reached into my pocket for my automatic. Johansen saw my gesture and caught my arm. He traveled with only a sporting-gun, now packed away.

"Quit that!" he growled. "They won't bother us; they're my friends. Wait."

At the first shots fired our caravan had halted. Johansen calmly jumped from the car and, with hands upraised, stepped a few paces in front. He yelled a few words in Mongolian, and pandemonium burst loose. Holding their guns high above their heads, the entire outfit of fifty or more, shouting hoarse, guttural exclamations, galloped to within several yards of him and reined in.

A staccato conversation followed, and in a few minutes, unmolested, we were again on our way. I was beginning to learn a few of the odd twists to Johansen's character. I said nothing. In time it would come.

"Did you notice the big chap with the scar on his check?" he began, after two hours of ruminating.

"I surely—" I started to answer. The Mongolian of whom he spoke was almost as large as Johansen, and the ragged scar extending down his left cheek added to his hard, bold face a sinister look that remained fixed in my mind.

"Don't interrupt," said Johansen. "He's a godless fellow, and that I regret, but he's a man. He's my friend, and I trade ponies with him. He steals his ponies, I know, but it is better that I, rather than others, buy them, and then use the profits to further the works of God. Thus is his evil requited in the eyes of the Lord.

"He, too, wants the girl, Li. For that I forgive him, for who does not? When the Living God's soldiers brought her across the plains to K'an K'al, twice he attacked the caravan to get the girl.

"The second time he got that wound, and they took him to K'an K'al, where I happened to be. They were going to chop off his head, but I begged off for him. For, you see, though his ways are godless, he's a man, and earnest in his desires.

"I treated him until he was well, and would have reformed him for God, but he listened not. Later he escaped, and took up his evil ways. He's my friend since then, and in our trades I have good profits."

We approached the little city one afternoon just before sundown, and its battered old dusty walls rising out of the plain made me feel that I was living in the days of Christ. Evidently we were sighted by a sentry on the wall, for while we were yet half a mile distant, a detachment of beturbaned soldiers garbed in baggy blue-denim uniforms galloped out to meet us and escort us through the city gates.

At sight of the motor-car they drew up sharply, but after a few words from Johansen, they lost somewhat of their timidity, although they would not come near the car. They knew Johansen and liked him; in the exuberance of their greeting they galloped at full speed in circles round us, shouting and laughing at the top of their voices.

Our camel train was divided and sent into several inns for the night. With great ceremony, Johansen and I drove up before the palace of the Living God. Every man, woman, child and dog in the town followed us at a respectful distance. Never before or since have I seen such fearful amazement. "A self-go cart! Drawn by the devil! Surely, surely!" The people were too fascinated, too enthralled, too frightened to do more than murmur their astonishment.

The palace consisted of a huge compound set in the heart of the city. The outer wall was of plastered brick stained a dull red, with shining green and yellow tiles running along the top. The two massive wooden gates of the main entrance creaked open into a large, grassy courtyard, in the center of which was an elaborate pagoda of flaming red and green; a fierce god carved from wood and three times the size of a man stood in the center, brandishing a pitchfork. A wall with two small gates separated the second courtyard, much larger than the first, and containing at the rear a temple, in front of which were two stone lions. The eaves of the temple were supported by great wooden pillars lacquered a deep red; twined round the pillars from top to bottom were exquisitely carved dragons, the work of a master. The roof was laid with the regulation green and yellow tiles.

At least eight more courtyards were behind this one, but we were halted here and ushered by the priests into the temple. There was only one enormous room, high and dark and cool. The floor was of stones laid cater-cornered and was bare; but on the walls hung beautiful silk tapestries of red and gold. Some depicted gods, others merely characters and symbols. In the center, at the back, was a platform containing a table and two chairs, the extent of the furniture save chairs, which were brought in for Johansen and me.

By the table, in one of the chairs, sat the Living God. He was dressed in a long gray-silk gown, with a tiny stiff gray-silk hat, like a miniature stovepipe, perched on the top of his head. As a god, he was a deep disappointment to me, for I had expected a *grand sieur*, an impressive, forceful leader. He was a little, good-natured pig. His face was that of a well-fed, contented baby, and as smooth, except for a mustache of eight or ten long whiskers drooping over the corners of his sensual mouth. His face was round; his features were round; his body was round.

"There is but one god," the fat little Living God volunteered complacently in English, "and I am he."

I was startled, and glanced at Johansen for a clue. To hear this chubby brown man make such a remark—and in English—gave me the weird feeling I might experience should a pig suddenly sit up, cross its hind legs and ask for a chew of tobacco. But Johansen did not bat an eye. He merely took a sip of tea and, turning to me, remarked casually:

"Isn't he a cute little beggar? That's the only English he knows. Wanted a greeting for foreigners, so I taught him that. Took weeks. By the way, you're nobility in your own country. I am. In fact, I'm a sort of Merlin. Got to be. The old chap is great on pedigree. Funny thing—in Tibet they're thick as fleas, and all jealous of being the only living god. Too many gods to go round—that's what drove me to trading ponies."

We three sat in the temple, Johansen and the god exchanging courtesies in Mongolian, I sipping tea and wondering. The god was so much frightened that Johansen spent an hour persuading him to go out and look at the motor-car; but he could not bring himself to believe that it was not connected with devils, and under no circumstances would he touch any part of the machinery or driving-gears. Not until several days later did he muster up sufficient courage to ride in it. He considered that it was bad joss to allow the self-go cart to remain in town after sundown, and, much to the satisfaction of Johansen, we were allowed to keep the car in an adobe shed just outside the east gate.

WHEN the god graciously dismissed us, we were escorted by a group of priests to our room in another courtyard. The entire furniture of the room consisted of a table and two chairs backed up against a *k'ang*, a raised brick platform covered with mats on which to unroll our sleeping-blankets.

"There will be a banquet in about an hour," said Johansen. And then he did a curious thing. From somewhere among his luggage he unearthed a faded dinner jacket of rare vintage, and proceeded to

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his toilet with the care of a débutante to her first party. Having no other t, I merely donned clean riding-es.

always like to do the old boy proud," inally volunteered. But from his ish, awkward manner, I knew that was something else on his mind.

e banquet, as far as I was concerned, huge success. The little fat god must taken up the art of entertaining in childhood, for never have I sat down h food. At least forty courses of sur- g and delicate dishes were served; and ink we had *samshui*, cognac and beer ent to pickle the remains of a camel. p it all, and as a special favor, the god or his favorite girls to group them- behind our chairs and divert us with and chatter, while the fat old *mamas* proudly in the background.

T it was not the feast or the god that ft the strongest impression in my mind xt day. It was the astounding grace auty of the girl, Li, and the behavior of lid Swede. The girl would have been ful anywhere, but in that room of ng girls she shone as a priceless pearl ust-heap. A velvety oval face of pale ever so slightly rouged on either features regular, with not a straight mong them; slanting, liquid dark- eyes, whispering of glorious myster- licately modeled lips which were al- challenge; the unmarred beauty of perfected by the natural poise cul- n a soil of age-old customs and tra- .

special honor, the god commanded to stand by Johansen's side. Johan- different from the man I had known o. He drank little—I know that; was nervous, and would talk volubly a low voice for minutes at a time, tch himself suddenly and pretend rest in some quip which he did not The little fat god was too drunk to and I should have been were not the of Johansen so apparent. When s left, he whispered hurriedly to Li, lling over the old *mama*, slipped ng into her hand. For a religious taciturn man, his behavior was al.

ly I staggered away to our quarters, supported by the arm of Johansen. With his aid I managed to undress and roll into my blankets. Tumblers of *samshui* and goblets of cognac combine to make the devil's own drink, and although I immediately dropped into a stupefied sleep, the mixture of fire with which I had been lining my stomach burned within me, and I writhed and twisted in wild dreams and moments of spasmodic consciousness. During one of these semiawakened fits I felt, rather than heard or saw, Johansen moving round the room, undressing, whistling softly to himself. It must have been hours after I had gone to bed.

The following day, nothing in regard to his midnight outing was mentioned by either of us. I had a sharp headache, and was not sure but that it was a part of my dreams. Moreover, we had work to do in putting together the yacht, and this we set about to do at once. What a tragedy to us was that yacht! First, we went out to look over the lake. Shall I ever forget Johansen's face? During a season of drought the lake had dried up; our astounded gaze met nothing but a gaping hole of dry stubble and rocks. Johansen was heart-broken; it was a matter of pride to him. But, to my surprise, the god did not seem to mind. I learned from Johansen that the little fellow did not know that the water made much difference, but thought that the boat was merely a peculiar foreign tabernacle in which he might play. But Johansen was obdurate about the water.

"If he thinks," he exclaimed, "that I packed this boat several thousand *li* just to have it set up on a rock like a turtle taking its sun-bath, he's mistaken! We shall have water—and have it quickly."

Stubborn? He made the little god lend dozens of carpenters and blacksmiths to construct a siphon from the nearest creek, a half-mile away, in order to pump water into the dried-out lake. A month of steady driving on the part of Johansen and myself completed the job. I worked like a trooper and learned what persistence and an indomitable spirit will do.

When the hole once more was covered by a shining sheet of water, we took out the plans and, with an army of native artisans behind us, prepared to set up the boat. And here was the most heart-breaking part

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of all. The boat was too big for the lake! Johansen had been given seventy-five thousand dollars to purchase a yacht; he ordered the boat; it was shipped to him in knocked-down condition, and, without considering measurements, he had repacked the parts on camels and carried them a distance of a thousand miles or more before he studied the plans. There was no possible way of enlarging the lake without leveling the walls of the compound, for it covered the space of one of the courtyards. The boat was too large and the lake too small—that was all there was to it.

The Living God, however, did not worry in the least, but ordered that the yacht be set up. It meant nothing to him that fore and aft it pressed against the sides of the lake. He turned it into a tea-house and was delighted. But if Johansen was grouchy and taciturn before, now he was a caged lion. Even so, I sensed other worries crowding his mind—worries at which I could only guess. There was no mistake now about his nocturnal outings. At night, when he thought that I was asleep, he would sneak out quietly, returning at two or three in the morning. Heaven knows how he evaded the guards and sentries which were stationed at every gateway unless he gave them bountiful squeeze; but I was sure that he was seeing Li, and later events proved the correctness of my surmise.

PROBABLY three months passed, during which, enveloped in the cloud of Johansen's silence, I waited for a hint from him. Our time was spent in putting together the boat, riding and hunting, feasting, and playing with the little god, who loved Johansen as a mother and chatted with him by the hour. I was becoming impatient and nervous. Had Johansen given up hope? Had his plans, by any chance, been knocked in the head?

I had not reckoned to the full the quiet steadiness of purpose in his make-up. With no other warning, one evening after we had gone to bed, he casually announced that the next night we would kidnap Li.

"Every thing is ready," he said. "It's the dark of the moon, and the sooner now the better. I couldn't before; I owed it to the god to fix up the boat first. He's my friend, you see; I had to do that."

The quality of his conscience! He would steal his friend's most cherished possession, but, first, he would perform faithfully all outstanding contracts.

"By the grace of God and by bribing Chu, the chief eunuch, and the *amah*, I've seen and talked with Li almost every night. So I've fixed it with Chu that she meet me to-morrow night as usual at the southeast corner of the courtyard. That's the farthest courtyard, where all the girls are. At midnight you be on top of the wall at the rear and catch the rope when I'm ready. We'll haul her up and run for the car.

"Chu's the only one who knows. I can trust him. But Li doesn't know. I've talked again and again to Li and the *amah*, tried to show them the Lord was on our side and there was no danger. But they're scared. So I gave up arguing. Little Li doesn't know we're going to take her away to-night; it will have to be a surprise. I'll gag her so that she won't scream.

"It's the only way," he added, as I raised my eyebrows in astonishment. "She loves me, and would probably go, anyway, but I can't take chances. I'm going to marry her all right. I meant what I said."

This was the second time that he had reassured me. Whether he married her or not made no difference to me. I was too excited and intoxicated at being a part of such an extraordinary abduction. But when I reflect now, I know, of course, that I had no doubts. Johansen thought simply and straight. Such an elopement did not seem unusual to his mind. He wanted this woman as his own, and he took the simplest and most expeditious methods for getting her. Johansen was a great man. I loved him.

Pitchy blackness surrounded me when I climbed to the top of the wall and lay there awaiting Johansen and the girl. Everything was in readiness. On our way to K'an K'al, petrol had been stored at rest-houses along the route, and ponies awaited us should the car fail. We had gone out of the city shortly before dark and started the engine. In order that the gatekeepers might have no suspicion, Johansen had taken pains to go out one or more times every night we were there. I lay flat on the wall, waiting, my heart beating a rapid tattoo from sheer excitement.

Suddenly, almost below me, I could dis-
guish two black masses in a short, sharp
uggle; as suddenly as it started it stopped,
d I heard Johansen whisper,

'Here!"

\nd he tossed up a rope, the other end of
ich was tied to the figure below. Johansen
ckly struggled up beside me, and we
e cautiously pulling up our load when,
m across the courtyard, a shriek rang out,
owed by another, and then a general
eaming.

Neither of us uttered a word but deliber-
ly continued our task of working down
outside of the wall and hurried away as
t we might, half carrying, half dragging
poor thing down the dark road toward
gate. The noise behind us was in-
sing, and by the time we reached the
e, we could hear voices raised in an up-
:.

t the gate, two soldiers were on guard,
to them Johansen hurriedly spoke a
words in Mongolian. One pulled out
y and started toward the gate, heard the
ng of our pursuers and hesitated.

Here—hold her one second," Johansen
to me, and turning to the guard,
mn you!" he muttered.

atching the key with his left hand, with
ight he grasped the fellow's neck, held
up for a second as if he were a rat, then,
the full force of his huge body threw—
st tossed—him against the other sentry,
ing them both crashing against the
where they fell and lay.

e were out of there and into the car in
time to get clear of the mob behind us.
w shots were fired but went wild.
nsen drove; I sat behind, clutching
steadying my hooded companion.

E DROVE for an hour, and at last
I was beginning to breathe easily,
out of the darkness, from nowhere, it
ed, loomed up a line of bobbing black
s, blocking the trail before us. Johan-
rought the car to a slow stop. The
of having Li struck by a bullet pre-
d him from driving full speed ahead.

e bobbing masses closed in and we
fronted, I could see now, by a band of
hu tze. Johansen slipped from the car;
raised, he walked forward into the
of the car-lamps and stood motionless.
k figure dismounted. Gun poised for
instant action, it waddled slowly to within a few feet of Johansen. In the glare of the headlights I could distinguish a hard yellow face with a ragged scar running down the left cheek. It was Johansen's friend, the robber leader.

"Johansen, my master, whom do you carry?"

Their conversation was in Mongolian, but the translation I later dragged from Johansen's stubborn lips.

"Ah, Chung, 'tis thee? May our Lord bless thee and thine. I carry two friends only. Put down thy gun."

"Nay; I would see your friends, Johansen, master. I am but your poor servant, yet I would see your friends."

Johansen hesitated a second.

"Come thou with me, Chung." Together they walked to the side of the car. The horsemen drew nearer and, with guns leveled on us, waited. I had not moved from the rear seat. As he drew close, Johansen, without turning his head, spoke to me in low, level tones.

"Get out that automatic of yours, so he can't see it, and slip it to me when I bend over." Turning to Chung, he said: "Here, my friend, is it enough? May we go in peace?"

"Nay, master; if it please you, I would have you uncover this—your friend." I could see in the dark the outline of his sneering smile.

"To Chu, the fat eunuch," he added, "I also give squeeze, my master. I awaited your coming, and I would have you uncover your friend."

"Have thy way, Chung." And, stepping on the running-board, Johansen leaned over. With his left hand he dragged off the head-covering; with his right he grasped the pistol which I passed to him. Chung shifted his gun to one arm and peered over the side of the car.

"Hell's blazes!" muttered Johansen, and Chung growled deep in his throat.

This was the second time I had heard Johansen swear. They were staring, horror-stricken, into the frightened, speechless face of the Living God! Chu, the wily eunuch, had made a triple cross!

Johansen was the first to recover. He stepped to the ground and stood close to Chung. His right arm hung straight, and I knew that my automatic, held low and at his side, covered Chung. In the darkness they offered to the eyes of the horsemen only two blurred shadows.

Savagely, Chung faced round, his rifle still resting in the hollow of one arm.

"A trick, eh?" he bellowed. Very well, my master. The god will serve my purpose. I shall hold him in ransom for the girl, Li. Eh, my master?"

"Quiet, Chung, my friend, or I shoot."

Chung stared at Johansen in amazement, then down at the automatic, now pressed against his belly, and stiffened.

"My word is ever good, thou knowest," continued Johansen, almost in a whisper. "Be thou still, my friend, and wait." His mouth was twisted into a grim smile.

With eyes fixed on Chung, his low, even voice addressed the god.

"Oh, sire, wouldst thou return to K'an K'al and in peace? Then listen. Thou knowest I desire the girl, Li, as my own. Promise me, on thy word as a god, the girl and thy continued protection, and no harm shall befall thee. I, Johansen, shall return thee safely and at once to K'an K'al."

For a full half minute—Johansen later said that it was at least three hours—the silence was broken only by the dull stamping of the ponies in the hazy background.

"Quickly! I weary."

"I promise, faithfully I promise!" at last squeaked the little god.

"It is good," said Johansen. "Now"—to Chung—"tell thy men that all is well, that it is thy order that they await thee here, and that thou wouldst ride with me, thy friend, a short distance, and talk. No harm will befall thee; I promise. Quickly, Chung, my good friend, else I shoot." While he was talking, with his left hand Johansen snatched Chung's rifle and pitched it into the bottom of the car.

"All is well!" shouted Chung to his followers. "Lower your guns. I ride with my friend and return shortly. Await me here. We complete our bargain."

Johansen marched Chung ahead of him into the front seat. He passed the automatic to me. Clutching the back of the seat, I stood holding the gun pressed against Chung's head. Johansen took the wheel, turned the car, and we headed back toward K'an K'al. When we were beyond rifle-range, Johansen stopped the car and requested Chung to descend.

" Till the next seeing, Chung; have for me many ponies."

Gazing up at Johansen, across the impassive face of Chung flashed a look of admiration.

" Till the next seeing, master. Aye; the ponies shall be many and good." He bowed, saluted, and the blackness swallowed him.

Long after Chung had disappeared, Johansen remained leaning heavily over the steering-wheel. Finally, with a sigh, he straightened up and started the car on its way.

"Godless—but a man," he said slowly.

We had not gone far before we heard the rapid clatter of ponies galloping on the hard-beaten trail. For the third time that night the car stopped and Johansen descended. This time, it was the god's cavalry in pursuit of us. Johansen, standing in the light, waved his arms. A harsh command from the leader; the ponies came to a halt.

"I bring sire, the god!" boomed Johansen. "Well and safe I bring him. Delivered from the evil hand of Chung, the *hung hu tze*."

Good fortune hovered on Johansen's shoulder. In the general confusion of the night, no one could say who had abducted the god. A hoarse yell of approval from the soldiers greeted his statement.

"Speak to them!" Johansen commanded the god. No answer. "Punch him in the side," said Johansen to me in English.

I punched. Still no answer. I bent down. The Living God had fainted!

OUR entry into K'an K'al was a triumph. No one but Chu knew exactly what had happened, and Chu, poor devil, was never given the opportunity to explain. But Johansen was a hero. With his bare hands, whispered rumor, he had destroyed dozens of armed bandits; his prowess was turning rapidly into a contemporary legend. No doubt, some said, the god had lent to him supernatural powers. But about the Living God, opinions varied. Of course, he could not be hurt—that was impossible; only, it could not be gainsaid that Johansen, too, was mighty in his own right.

The little god was too happy at having saved his face to care for anything else. A banquet was ordered for the evening.

During the day, lying on the *k'ang* in our room, Johansen and I rested. Although exhausted from excitement, I could not sleep. The events of the night continued to shoot through my mind. All day Johansen did not close his eyes but lay still.

Toward dusk we rose and prepared for the banquet. Johansen donned his faded dinner jacket, and when we were led by a group of priests to the main temple, I noticed under his arm a Bible.

The god, with a mass of priests behind him, stepped to the temple entrance and greeted us. Johansen walked up to him and spoke at great length. The god, smiling and rubbing his hands, from time to time interrupted with little grunts of assent. Johansen finished; the little god clapped his hands and issued orders. A hustling and scurrying to and fro, and I found myself standing in the rear of the room, facing the entrance. On my right was Johansen, and on his right the god. On either side a row of priests extended from us to the entrance. Wondering, I waited expectantly.

I did not wait long. In the doorway appeared Li, robed in a gown of pale-blue silk embroidered with gold and extending to her dainty ankles. Her hair was smoothed from her forehead and plaited down her back in a long braid, interwoven with the virginal red-silk cord. She stood, framed in the doorway, erect and serene.

Johansen, Bible in hand, marched slowly down to meet her, drew her arm through his, and with measured tread retraced his steps until they were immediately opposite the god and me.

Johansen opened his Bible and for several minutes rumbled away in Mongolian. He closed the book and to Li put several questions, to each of which she replied with a word of one syllable, always the same. The same formula was repeated with himself.

A pause. A rumble from Johansen. A ring—too large—on the finger of Li. His arms round her.

The only minister within the radius of a month's journey, Johansen had acted at his own wedding.

Two Novelettes—Six Short Stories in October

AMONG them a story of the tropics with an interesting triangle—the father, the daughter about whom he built a wall, and the man.

Amidon's Island By Paul Annixter

Should we always, without regard to consequences, act in accordance with what the world calls "duty"?

Daddy's Girl By Wallace Irwin

The short stories include "Soothing Nervous Nick," by Leonard Hatch, good world-series reading; "The Stirring," by Nelia Gardner White, a prescription for parsons and others; "When Fear Was Forgotten," by Henry Francis Granger, another "little journey back home;" "The Rise of Spotty Lafitte," by William C. McCloy, a new angle as to respectability, and "The Dopester," by Courtney Ryley Cooper, which shows what a venal animal-trainer might do.

October *EVERYBODY'S*—out September 15th

Captain Applejack

A Diverting Comedy About a Lonely Man Who Thinks He Must Go Out into the World for Romance and Adventure, But Finds It in His Own Home

By Walter Hackett

Published by courtesy of the author and the producer, Sam Harris

THE *Applejohns* have always been a well-ordered family. Their conservatism extends even to the small details of daily life. Consequently, when *Ambrose Applejohn,* one winter's night, refuses his dessert, his usual after-dinner port and his coffee, great is the consternation of *Mrs. Whatcombe,* his aunt, and *Poppy,* his ward.

POPPY: Er—Aunt Agatha—do you think that perhaps the trouble with Ambrose is that he—that he is in love?

MRS. WHATCOMBE: Don't be absurd, Poppy! Who could he be in love with?

Poppy is taken aback by this direct question. It is quite clear whom she hopes he is in love with.

POPPY: Well—er—of course I couldn't say that—but he *has* lost his appetite, hasn't he?

MRS. WHATCOMBE: Why, he never sees any women but you and me. In love—ridiculous!

Mrs. Whatcombe's uneasiness increases when she finds in a copy of *Country Life* a picture of the house, which is situated on the Cornish coast, and a notice that it is for sale.

When *Ambrose* enters, they try to act as though nothing extraordinary had happened. They turn on him fixed welcoming smiles, which meet with no response. He is a good-looking but "settled-down" sort of man in the early forties. To-night he is much perturbed over something. *Mrs. Whatcombe's* desire to be tactful finally gives way to her desperate eagerness to get to the bottom of *Ambrose's* trouble.

MRS. WHATCOMBE (*majestically*): Ambrose, I am an Applejohn and Poppy is the ward of the Applejohns. We are both strong enough to bear any blow. Tell us your bad news.

AMBROSE: But I have none.

MRS. WHATCOMBE (*thrusting the* Country Life *at him*): Then *what* is the meaning of *this?*

AMBROSE: Well—I feel the need of a change.

MRS. WHATCOMBE: Do you actually mean to tell me that you are parting with our ancestral home because of a mere whim?

AMBROSE: It isn't a whim. My health demands it.

MRS. WHATCOMBE: Nonsense! You are looking wonderful!

AMRBOSE: Outwardly, perhaps. (*Laying his hand on his heart mournfully.*) But here it is different.

MRS. WHATCOMBE (*anxiously*): Do you mean your liver is bothering you again?

AMBROSE (*indignant*): Certainly not!

MRS. WHATCOMBE: Then what?

AMBROSE: Aunt Agatha, I am growing old.

This bitter truth was thrust upon him last week, he says, when two young ladies offered him their seats in a railway carriage.

MRS. WHATCOMBE: But I still don't see why you wish to sell this house.

AMBROSE: It was Johnny Jason who advised me to sell it. He pointed out to me that it was not my years but this house that was aging me. So I gave him a commission to dispose of it, and at the same ıe sent that advertisement to *Country Life*;

: I haven't had any response from either.

ᴍRS. WHATCOMBE: How on earth can ; house be aging you?

ıMBROSE: It keeps me in the rut. I do same things at the same time in the same ʳ every day, not because I want to but ause I did the same things at the same e in the same way yesterday, and the on I did them yesterday was that I did n the day before, and the reason I did n the day before—as Jason says, it isn't years but monotony that's aging me, he's right. I am going out into the d to find my youth again. I am going e life—to seek adventure, romance.

ıter, when *Mrs. Whatcombe* has gone :ully to bed, *Ambrose* expands on his theme to *Poppy*.

ıBROSE: I will miss you both condedly, but I must go, Poppy. All my I've lived in a backwater. Romance passed me by. But now I realize that the one thing worth living for—that hing for it is the only way to spend your Of course, *you* can't understand all

PPY: Oh, yes, I can. But I don't see makes you think it is so far away?

BROSE (*so intent on his idea that he does eed her words*): As Jason said to me, re not selling this house for money— re trading it for the lure of the open –the Gipsy quarter of Seville—a light night in Tangier, the mysterious –adventure—romance! I crave adre, Poppy; I should like to match my ıgainst an arch-villain—and then—I to rescue a beautiful young woman— some terrible danger—preferably a ı princess. Her gratitude would be ıffecting.

PY (*tremulously*): Do you mean you— e going to be married?

ROSE: Well — er — well, I haven't d quite as far ahead as that.

rose does hope, however, to expelove at first sight. *Jason*, equally n love and salesmanship, has made it glorious, and sure to any one with : to venture forth for it. He deit to *Poppy* as *Jason* did to him.

ROSE: Don't you see now, Poppy, nust sell this place?

Y: But do you know where to go to this?

AMBROSE: You can always find it—anywhere—except at home.

Poppy goes off to bed at ten o'clock, and *Lush*, the butler, sets about locking up for the night. Suddenly there comes a loud knocking, which startles both men.

AMBROSE (*vexed*): Most unusual for any one to come at this hour. One does not care to have one's habits interfered with.

Anna Valeska is shown into the library by *Lush*. She is a strikingly beautiful woman. *Ambrose* thinks at first that she has come to buy the house, and that the strange hour is accounted for by the fact that she is a foreigner, a fact that explains any inconsistency of behavior to him. But she tells him, with dramatic gestures, that it is sanctuary she wants. For *Borolsky*, Bolshevik spy, is at her heels. She pretended to connive with Lenin in order to save the jewels of her patron, the Grand Duchess Sonia, from confiscation, and take them to her in Paris, but her design was discovered and *Borolsky* was sent after her. Loud knocking is heard again as *Anna* finishes her narrative. With a cry of fear, she rushes into an adjoining room. *Lush* announces a gentleman and a lady whose motor has broken down near by. *Ambrose* heaves a sigh of relief when *Lush* adds that they are English.

The *Pengards* are a curious couple. She is a large, effusive woman, and he a mysterious-looking man with a turban wound round his head. The motor accident was merely an excuse to gain admission to the house, and when *Ambrose* leaves the library for a few minutes, they quickly unlock one of the windows and tap the panels near the fireplace. When they hear *Ambrose* in the hall, they hurriedly assume the positions they were in when he left. Presently their chauffeur sends word by *Lush* that the car is ready, and they go. It is long past *Ambrose's* bedtime, but it seems that his busy evening is just at its height. *Borolsky* is announced. He comes straight to the point of his visit.

BOROLSKY: Mr. Applejohn, I am searching for a lady.

AMBROSE: It's a wonderful pastime!

BOROLSKY (*fiercely*): It is not a pastime with me.

AMBROSE: No?

BOROLSKY: No; not this one. She has tricked me—betrayed me and my friends.

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And when any one trifles with me, I always hunt them down and make them suffer. Remember that!

AMBROSE (*blinking*): But what has that got to do with me?

BOROLSKY (*recovering himself*): Nothing, of course.

AMBROSE (*with relief*): I am glad of that.

BOROLSKY: Except that it will explain my presence here under these unusual circumstances. The woman I seek is somewhere in this neighborhood. For the moment she has eluded me, but I mean to find her.

Ambrose gets rid of him, but with considerable difficulty, and it is finally decided that *Anna* shall pass the night with the *Applejohns*. She has succeeded by clever flattery in putting *Ambrose* on very good terms with himself. Her soft glances make him forget the painful incident of the railway carriage. He keeps thinking that this may be the woman of all the world for him and he makes clumsy attempts to play the gallant, but when *Anna*, evidently an adept in these affairs, responds very willingly, he becomes frightened and backs down.

When *Ambrose* has gone to bed, the *Pengards* return through the window, which they unfastened on their earlier call. They set to work immediately to pry open one of the panels near the fireplace. But working only by the light of an electric torch, *Pengard* brushes against something and drops his jimmy. It makes a great crash, and they leave in haste.

Poppy and *Ambrose* come down to investigate the noise, and they discover the partly open panel. They were unaware of its existence, and *Ambrose* takes up the poker and feels about in the cupboard. He finds a sheet of parchment.

POPPY: Well, you wouldn't think burglars would go to all that trouble for an old sheet of parchment, would you?

AMBROSE (*examining parchment*): Poppy, this is a letter to his descendants from old Ambrose Applejohn, the founder of our family, the man who built this house. (*Still reading.*) But his name wasn't Applejohn. No; he was Applejack—Captain Applejack. Poppy, the founder of our family was the notorious pirate, Captain Applejack! He assumed the name of Applejohn to deceive the king's men—there's a brain for you!—who were hunting him, and escaped the execution-dock.

POPPY: Well, it was very careless of him to leave that paper lying about—wasn't it?

AMBROSE (*reading*): He left it to his descendants, that is you and me and Aunt Agatha, so that his descendants might find his hidden treasure. Bars of gold, hundreds of them and precious stones—rubies, diamonds, pearls, bushels of them, a fortune, a colossal fortune!

In their absorption they have forgotten the burglars. Suddenly *Ambrose* remembers, and tells *Poppy* to telephone the police. But the wire is dead. An involuntary groan bursts from him. The house is miles from anywhere, and he is the only man here except *Lush*.

POPPY: But Ambrose, you wanted adventure——

AMBROSE: Yes, by God; and I've got it!

Three hours later, *Poppy* and *Ambrose* are keeping watch in the library. At least, *Poppy* is keeping watch. She is reading aloud from the old parchment, unaware that *Ambrose* has fallen asleep.

POPPY (*reading*): "And off the island of Escanaba we captured the Portuguese brigantine *Faraleone*—her crew put up a gallant fight—but we killed all hands save one—a woman—the daughter of the captain, a haughty wench, but comely." It doesn't tell where the treasure is hidden, does it?

The alarm-clock which *Poppy* brought down to keep *Ambrose* awake rings.

AMBROSE (*yawning*): What time is it?

POPPY: Five minutes to two.

AMBROSE: I haven't been up so late as this for years.

POPPY: Think! Any minute those men might attack us.

AMBROSE: I know; but I simply can't keep awake.

POPPY: Perhaps if I went to the kitchen and got you a cup of coffee——

AMBROSE: That would help enormously.

AMBROSE promises not to fall asleep while *Poppy* is away, but he cannot keep his eyes open, and soon his head falls forward on his chest. It is not into the usual dreamless sleep of the *Applejohns* that he goes, however. The unwonted happenings of the night have worked on his subconsciousness, and now he lives the adventurous life which his friend *Jason* extolled as the best offset to old age. His

n is peopled by the strangers who so
enly entered his life a few hours before.
: becomes *Captain Applejack*, his rakish
e ancestor, and his quiet library be-
s the captain's cabin on an old pirate
He sees *Borolsky* standing menac-
with folded arms.

BROSE: So you are still here, my mate,
ou?

ROLSKY: Still here, Captain.

BROSE (*bawling*): Boy, boy, fetch me
grog—blast ye!

PY (*from the distance*): Aye, aye, Cap-

BROSE: Hell! Stir your stumps! (*To*
ky.) Well, are you deaf, man? You
me order you on deck with the crew?

OLSKY (*sulking*): Aye—I did.

BROSE: And you have not obeyed me.
d, I'll have no insubordination aboard
aft. Hark ye, my mate—I am a
nan—and timid, loving peace and
to brawling—d'you see?—but if you
go at once, I'll cut your black heart
last ye. (*The fierceness of his tone*
s Borolsky. He weakens, then turns
uffles off.) Scum! Scum!

y enters. She is dressed as the
boy. She carries a pannikin of rum.

Y: Your grog, Captain.

ROSE: Give it here. (*Slaps her on*
oulder.) Close me yonder door.
rum at a draft and smacks his lips.)
ng to the innards—d'you see?

notions *Poppy* to silence as three of
pass the window, then bawls at the
his lungs:

e along, ye lily-livered lubbers—
ye! (*The men disappear, terror-*
) Scum!

ose goes to the sideboard and, open-
cret door, takes out a rusty old iron
e carries it to the table, and plung-
his hands, opens them and lets a
g stream of jewels fall back into the
oppy stares, fascinated.

OSE: Feast your eyes, boy; 'tis the
captured from the Portuguese
ne. D'you see? (*Diving his hand*
treasure again.) 'Tis a king's ran-
Diamonds, rubies, sapphires——

: Blow me tight! An' I whisper a
your ear, you'll not beat me?

OSE: Nay, lad; 'tis my pleasure al-
be kindly. Say on.

(*in a low voice*): The crew—they know of this treasure. The men say an' you not share this with them, they will rise against you. You will not brave them?

AMBROSE (*in a voice of thunder*): What! Aye; that I will—timid as I am—d'you see?—and hating trouble, I'll face them single-handed if I must. I'll slit them ear to ear. What I have I keep.

POPPY: Then you'll give them no share?

AMBROSE: Nay, lad; not a stiver. 'Tis my fancy to take this, return to England and become respectable. Aye; that has always been my goal—respectability. I became a pirate that I might amass enough to afford me so great a luxury and the means are here. Now, lad, go tell the bos'un to fetch hither the Portuguese woman we captured on the brigantine. I am in mood for dalliance.

Though in reality *Ambrose* is shy with women, in his dream he is a bold lover. *Anna* enters. In place of the fiery Slav she has become a languid Latin woman.

AMBROSE: How now, my pretty? (*He chucks her under the chin.*)

ANNA (*in a panic*): Oh——

AMBROSE (*reassuringly*): Tut—tut! Ha, ha! (BOROLSKY *enters. He does not flinch when* AMBROSE *faces him, but comes and stands over* ANNA.) So you are back again?

BOROLSKY: Aye, Captain; I am back again.

AMBROSE: And for what purpose?

BOROLSKY: The woman pleases me. (ANNA *shrinks.*)

AMBROSE: Then indeed you are unfortunate—for she has taken my fancy also. D'you see?

BOROLSKY: 'Twas I who captured her.

AMBROSE: Hark ye—by nature I am as placid as a rivulet ambling through a meadow, but I brook no interference between me and a lady. (*He takes out dagger and sharpens it on boot.*) Do you still question my claim to the wench? (BOROLSKY *stands tense, as though meditating a fight, pulls out his dagger, but seeing* AMBROSE *ready to stick him, he relaxes and goes off.* AMBROSE *turns, sticks his dagger into the table.*) Scum! (*He makes a low bow to* ANNA.) I cry your pardon—'Tis not my wont to keep a lady waiting.

All at once *Anna* collapses and crawls at his feet, crying, "Mercy—mercy!"

AMBROSE: Come; sit ye here, my lass, and gaze upon me. Is there naught that takes your eye?

body's Magazine, September, 1922

In *Ambrose's* dream, his ward, *Poppy Faire* (Phoebe Foster), is transformed into the cabin-boy of the pirate ship.

He has placed her by the table on which he has struck his dagger. *Anna's* eyes fall upon this, and an idea possesses her. Like lightning she reaches over, takes the dagger and hides it in the folds of her dress. She leads him on and watches sharply for an opening. Her chance comes when *Ambrose* tries to draw her to his knee, but he seizes her wrist just in time to save himself.

AMBROSE: Hell-cat! (*Then, smiling.*) You need not hide your head in shame. I like you all the more for having spirit.

Then he kisses her fiercely, and pushes her through the door.

Borolsky, the mate, and *Pengard*, the bos'un, have been inciting the crew to mutiny. *Borolsky* is tempted both by the gold and jewels and by the woman, and he is encouraged by her manner with *Captain Applejack* to hope that she will help them. His plan is that she shall lure the captain on and then kill him. She appears to fall in with their scheme, but of the two she prefers the captain, and so she gives him warning.

AMBROSE: So they have dared! Well, let them come—all of them! I'll show them Ambrose Applejack is master still.

The doors are burst open and a group of sailors headed by *Borolsky* and *Pengard* rush in. *Borolsky* is their leader, but when the men see what a valiant stand *Ambrose* makes against such overwhelming odds, they waver. It is then that he makes a daring proposal—that he and *Borolsky* cut the cards to see who shall be captain—the winner takes all; the loser dies. *Borolsky* shrinks, but urged by the crew, to whom it makes strong appeal, he consents. *Borolsky* wins on the first cut, but on the second and third *Ambrose* cuts aces.

AMBROSE: Take him away, men! Let pirate justice be done! (*The men seize* BOROLSKY *and take him off shouting and screaming.*) So perish all who cross my path! (AMBROSE *lifts his arm and a number of cards drop from his sleeve to the floor. To* POPPY.) Aces, all Aces! D'you see?

WHEN *Poppy* returns from the kitchen with the steaming coffee, she finds *Ambrose* writhing in his chair.

POPPY: Ambrose! (*She switches on the bracket-lamps, then shakes him.*) Ambrose! Wake up! Here is the coffee. And you promised me you would not fall asleep.

AMBROSE: But you were such a long time getting it.

POPPY: I've only been five minutes.

AMBROSE: Five minutes! Only five minutes! It doesn't seem possible——

POPPY (*starting up in sudden alarm*): Sh! Those men have come back.

AMBROSE: Good Lord, I had forgotten all about them!

POPPY: Ambrose, you must go and drive them away. (*She hands him the poker.*)

His heroic manner has quite vanished, but he summons his courage and, going to the window, turns back the curtain a little with the end of the poker.

AMBROSE (*with a sigh of relief*): There no one outside—not a soul. I don't think will hear any more from them to-night, ppy.

POPPY: What a disappointment! Oh, nbrose, it would be wonderful if you ould rescue me from some horrible dan- ! That would be an adventure.

AMBROSE: Poppy, there is nothing I the so much as adventure. It's a great stake ever to get out of the rut.

OPPY: You mean you would let them e the treasure?

MBROSE: I couldn't stop them, could I? ere would be three or four to one. After quelling burglars single-handed is not occupation for a respectable house- der.

OPPY: But, Ambrose, you are not re- table. You don't come from a ectable family. Your ancestor was lejack, the pirate. Have you forgotten parchment?

MBROSE (*horrified*): Then I am not re- table. Nothing to cling to. Poppy, is a great shock.

OPPY: Perhaps if you drank your e——

MBROSE: No! Not coffee. Give me whisky, blast ye! (*The last two words come from him quite unconsciously in one that he used in his dream. He is lerstruck*; POPPY *is horrified.*)

IBROSE: I do beg your pardon. I know why I spoke so—but if you dn't mind mixing me some whisky and ——

takes a long drink, then speaks again sely as Applejack did.

BROSE: Ah, there is nothing like grog rm a man's innards. (*As the voice falls s ears, he is greatly startled. The glass rom his hand; he stares at* POPPY *wide-* Poppy! Why did I say that?

PY: I don't know, Ambrose. I never you speak like that before.

ppy hears a noise again. They darken oom and *Ambrose* takes a revolver his table drawer. *Anna Valeska* stealthily into the room. *Ambrose* azed, but not suspicious. That she me for some secret and guilty pur- s clear enough. But he does not see e puts the pistol back in the drawer.

BROSE (*smiling broadly*): Anna——

IA: My dear friend——

In his dream, *Ambrose Applejohn* (Wallace Eddinger) becomes *Captain Applejack*, his daring pirate ancestor.

AMBROSE: It is very good of you to call me that.

ANNA: But you are!

He bends toward her. *Poppy* who has been watching them with ever increasing jealousy takes a step forward.

POPPY (*sharply*): Ambrose! You are forgetting those men. You ought to be watching for them.

AMBROSE: Well—I—(*He looks down into* ANNA'S *eyes. This look banishes all hesitation.*) Poppy, I can't attend to everything. Have Lush wakened and tell him to keep a lookout. Hustle along, Poppy; I have a great deal to say to Madame Valeska. (POPPY *lingers.*) Hell! Stir your stumps! (*He is again startled by hearing his voice with such an odd expression.*)

Anna glibly invents a story that will cover her early-morning tour and will also achieve its purpose. The fear that *Borolsky* would come and steal the jewels of the grand duchess kept her awake, she says.

ANNA: Then, all at once, the thought he come to me—this house he is most ancient. There must be many secret hiding-places—if I can find me one, and the jewels are safe——

AMBROSE (*knowingly*): Ha! (*He swaggers across to the wall and presses the panel.*) The secret of the ancient family of Applejack—or Applejohn. Give me the jewels. (*He places her jewel-case in the cupboard and slides the panel back.*) Now let Borolsky search for them!

ANNA: Oh, my friend, you are magnificent!

AMBROSE: And you are wonderful!

ANNA: No, no! You must not speak like that.

AMBROSE: When I look at you, I can speak of nothing else.

Three loud knocks are now heard, and shortly after *Borolsky* enters the library, followed by a man who wears the uniform of an inspector of Police.

BOROLSKY: I wish to have a chat with the lady.

AMBROSE: Then you are indeed unfortunate. I desire to have a chat with her myself. (*He falls somewhat into* APPLEJACK'S *manner.*)

BOROLSKY: This officer may persuade you to put aside your objection.

AMBROSE (*contemptuously*): The law! (*Snaps his fingers.*) That for the law!

ANNA: My friend, it is better that we do all that the policeman asks us. For my sake, go. If I need you, I will ring.

AMBROSE: Very well, then, my man—but I sha'n't be far away. Hark ye! I shall be most displeased if this lady suffers any annoyance, d'you see? Scum! (*He swaggers out, still carrying the poker.*)

The attitude of the three completely changes when they are alone. *Borolsky* kisses *Anna;* his suave dignity has vanished.

BOROLSKY: I'm damned glad you are all right, Gladys—I've worried about you. Did you find out where the secret cupboard is?

ANNA (*all her French accent gone*): Sure I did, Jim! That was what I came for, wasn't it?

BOROLSKY: And he does not suspect anything?

ANNA: Not a thing. He is too easy. Any one who would believe Bill there was a policeman would believe anything.

BOROLSKY: Gladys, you are a wonder! (*Kisses her again.*)

DENNET (*the man in uniform*): Never mind the love-making, even if she is your wife. Let's get to work. Where's the cupboard?

Anna shows him, and he sets to work. The *Pengards* enter silently through the window while *Dennet* and *Jim* are busy with the panel, and cover the three in the room with their pistols.

BOROLSKY: Little Pengard! And Mrs. Pengard! So you are in this, too?

MRS. PENGARD: Any time there is five hundred thousand pounds lying about loose, we are certain to be in it.

They finally agree to split the treasure, but when they open the panel, they find only the box containing the jewels—paste—of the mythical Grand Duchess Sonia.

Ambrose has taken the coveted parchment, and *Anna* is appointed to recover it. But this time her blandishments fail. In a rage she goes out through the window to join her husband and the *Pengards. Ambrose* takes a long drink of whisky.

POPPY (*entering*): Ambrose! There are some men in the garden. They're coming here for you. Ambrose, no matter what happens, I'm going to stand by you.

AMBROSE (*slapping her on the shoulder*): Brave lad! I love you! (*Dream-business.*) You don't seem frightened, Poppy. You're wonderful—so courageous! Poppy, I'm not going away. Not if I come out of this all right.

POPPY: You are going out into the world to find romance.

AMBROSE: It isn't necessary. It's right here at home. Poppy—you know you're awfully pretty! What a fool I've been! To think what I've always longed for has always been at my side and I did not see it—I always thought of you as my ward. I never——

POPPY: Ambrose—you mean——

He shows her that he does.

It is only fitting that the man who started

Ambrose Applejohn's fantastic pirate-dream is peopled chiefly by himself, his ward, and his evening's isitors. Here we see him as *Captain Applejack* (Wallace Eddinger), cutting cards with the mate, Borolsky (Hamilton Revelle), for command of the vessel and the hand of *Anna Valeska* (Mary Nash), who becomes a captured Portuguese woman.

brose on his quest for adventure should
n at the finish. *Johnny Jason* is an-
nced. He waves *Ambrose* aside when he
ns to recount the evening's experience.
knows all about it, he says. He wrote
parchment himself—copied it from one
he possession of an old sailor. It was
ly a part of his scheme to sell the
e—an unmarketable bit of real estate
use of its lonely location. As a proof
t; he brings out the original parch-
t.

MBROSE: This is real goatskin parch-
t—smell it. By Jove, here's a big
There wasn't one in the copy, and
's some writing under it. (*Reading.*)
the one who has the wit to find this
age." That's me. "Go to the south-
room overlooking the cliffs"—that is
room—"and stand with your back
ist the secret cupboard, where the se-
parchment was hid. Turn a semi-
." I am going to try it now. Poppy
the directions. Keep watch at the
ow, Jason.

ibrose follows the directions, and in the
beside the sliding panel they find a loose brick. When it is removed, the dust of years flies out and there they find bags upon bags, heaped up.

AMBROSE (*opens one and brings out something*): Tapioca!

POPPY: Ambrose, they're pearls!

AMBROSE (*greatly excited*): Pearls! Pearls! Bushels of pearls!

The discovery of the treasure has made *Ambrose's* dream seem more real than reality, so, with the swagger of his buccaneer ancestor, he makes a last stand against the *Pengards* and *Borolsky*, who have been watching through a window at the rear. As in his dream, *Ambrose* outwits them. Surreptitiously he rings the bell on *Poppy's* alarm-clock and pretends to talk on the telephone with the police. The thieves withdraw in great haste.

AMBROSE: So perish all who cross my path!

POPPY: Oh, Ambrose, to think that the telephone was repaired in time!

AMBROSE: But it hasn't been repaired. (*Taking the alarm-clock from the drawer and ringing the bell.*) Aces—all aces!

Poppy rushes into his arms.

xt month will be published Stanley Houghton's remarkable problem-play, "Fanny Hawthorne."
See October EVERYBODY'S—out September 15th.

The Bent Twig

What Is That Something, Present in Some, Absent in Others, Which Enables Us to Take Punishment and Go Back for More? A Question That Is Raised by a Father's Interesting Experiment with His Son

By Octavus Roy Cohen

TOM FERGUSON shoved through the front door with his enormous shoulders. His wife, seated before the gas-logs in the living-room of their suburban bungalow, knew that the big hands concealed behind the muscular back held a gift for Tom Ferguson, junior, aged five. So, too, did little Tom know it, and he scampered across the living-room. squealing with delight. Big Tom grinned and went solemnly through the ritual:

"Which hand?"

"That one"—pointing to the left.

The hand was extended—empty.

"Other one," hazarded Tom, junior.

The package was unusually large, the wrapping far too formidable for the youngster's eager pink hands. Big Tom assisted at the ceremonial of unwrapping—and the present was exposed to the sextet of glowing eyes.

"Boxin'-gloves!" screamed little Tom.

"Uh-huh."

Mary Ferguson slid into the crook of her husband's arm.

"Ain't they the darlingest things?"

Tom Ferguson, heavyweight prize-fighter, reached for a sofa-pillow, upon which he knelt, after having divested himself of coat and vest. Mary, meanwhile, was tying the tiny gloves on the hands of little Tom, while big Tom slipped three fingers of his enormous paws into each glove. Then the lesson began—earnestly, seriously.

"Left foot out, son—that's the way! Now—left hand extended—loose; just like that. Right in close to the body—no; not that way. So—that's it. Fists clenched—uh-huh; you got it, son—tight; just that-away. Now jab straight for daddy's face. Don't slap—hit!" The blow spanked sharply against big Tom's nose, and the big warrior looked up beamingly into his wife's adoring eyes.

"Say—he's just a natural-born fighter!"

That was little Tom's first boxing lesson.

Six months later, big Tom Ferguson was crowned heavyweight champion of the world.

Tom and Mary had married when he was eighteen and she a year younger. Little Tom came into the world a trifle less than a year later.

They were very happy in a sane, healthy, placid way. They purchased a little bungalow on the eternity plan, furnished it by the same method. They asked little of life, and were supremely grateful for what they had. At first, the neighbors raised their collective eyebrows and made caustic comment anent prize-fighters. But it was not long before Mary's half-timid and wholly appealing wistfulness won into their hearts—and Mr. and Mrs. Tom Ferguson became personages in the simple community.

There was no resisting Mary's timidity. It had won Tom in the first place, and it held him tight forever afterward. She was a shy little thing—yet firm as steel when sheer courage was required. And she was proud to bursting of her husband's gilistic attainments—despite the fact at he yet joked her about the single time saw him in action.

That had been soon after they were rried; he had been on for ten rounds with Bronx Tornado. He made a monkey of gentleman from the Bronx, outboxed , outslugged him, and finally knocked out. But Mary didn't see the knock- . Long before that, they had carried into Tom's dressing-room, unconscious.

What made you faint, honey?"

he smiled gamely.

I don't know, Tom. Honest I don't!"

You didn't think he was lickin' me, did ?"

No, dear. It wasn't that. But right r the fight started, I got afraid—I don't w what of—but I was afraid. And then ring started jumping and the crowd got ort of swimmy, and I was trembling all —and I couldn't see anything. I'm l ashamed, Tom."

e chuckled.

'wan, sweetness! There ain't nothin' ashamed of."

e patted his hand, grateful for his rstanding.

t was terrible silly, Tom."

fished awkwardly for a compliment.

id you think I shaped up pretty good?"

ou're the finest fighter in the world, And you've got the most foolish wife——"

here ain't but one woman for me, . You're it!"

ause, and then,

om?"

eah?"

voice was a trifle unsteady.

omise me something, Tom?"

re. What is it?"

omise you won't ever ask me to watch er fight."

u said it, honey."

he kept his promise.

HEN Tom Ferguson married, he had just graduated from the lightweight to the ranks of the welters. Within ears, he experienced difficulty in even the middleweight limit. It source of keen disappointment to and to Mary that, when he finally d the middleweight champion, he himself unable to meet the weight-conditions stipulated by the title-holder.

And so Tom Ferguson stepped into that nondescript and unrecognized pugilistic section known as the light heavyweight division. The championship of that was an empty honor—and Tom took them on at ten, fifteen, twenty pounds above his weight. The night he won the heavyweight championship of the world, he tipped the beam at one hundred and seventy-two. His opponent had a thirty-three-pound weight advantage.

But what Ferguson lacked in sheer avoirdupois, he more than atoned for in hitting power, shadowlike cleverness and indomitable gameness. On his great night, the ex-champion shook Tom's hand.

"S'long's I had to get mine, Tom, I'm glad it was you!"

And Mary—Mary was almost hysterical with delight at this ultimate triumph. She took little Tom on her lap and detailed to him the blows which had won for their man the greatest fistic honor of them all.

"And then," she explained, "he had him backed in a corner an' coverin' up, an' he ripped home an uppercut—and down he went—" She turned a bit pale and shuddered, then glowed pridefully, ashamed of her momentary feeling of weakness. Little Tom leaped for his own diminutive gloves.

"Bet an acorn I know how he done it!"

Big Tom watched the youngster smilingly.

"Yonder's our real fighter, Mary. Look how he shapes up—why, it's almost like he was born with boxin'-gloves on his hands! Say, sweetness, wouldn't it be great to have our kid get to be a champion?"

She nestled against him.

"Sure would, Tom! It'd be just wonderful!"

From the day of his coronation, Tom Ferguson knew that his reign would be short. There were a good many heavyweights, and each was entitled to his chance. Tom had no intention of side-stepping their defis. Of course, he very naturally took in a slice of the enormous money which is commonly tendered new fistic heroes—vaudeville engagements, personal recommendation of a certain line of sporting goods, exhibition bouts. Then he went again into serious training and announced his readiness to accept all worthy challenges.

Tom was too light to last long as emperor

erybody's Magazine, September, 1922

of the big fellows—none knew it better than he. But the sporting world loved him, and promoters worshiped him because, while he was no fool, he yet did not demand the United States Treasury as his end of the purse.

For three years Tom Ferguson held his title against the world—magnificent testimony to his superb stamina. When he finally took the full count, it was after fourteen rounds of fighting which sent the fans home delirious with delight—and filled with a great pity. Even those who had bet against him were sorry to see him dethroned.

And the neighbors in the little suburb tendered Tom a reception which far surpassed their tribute the day following his elevation to the greatest of all fighting-thrones. It was significant of the man's character that he was greater in defeat than in victory.

Mary Ferguson did not weep when he was beaten. She held his big bruised, right hand in both of her little ones.

"I'm sorry, Tom."

"So'm I, Mary. But it had to come. I just ain't got the weight."

Little Tom insinuated himself between his father's knees. He was nearly nine now—tall and broad in an awkward, ungainly way.

"Pops?"

"Yes, son?"

"How old do I have to be before I can lick that big stiff who beat you?"

Big Tom grinned affectionately.

"You think you're goin' to be a fighter?"

"Huh! I know it. I'm going to be a champeen."

Eyes of the parents met proudly—and something like a sigh escaped from between the bruised lips of Big Tom. He put his dream into words.

"Yes; you're gonna be a champion, son. You're gonna be a real champ!"

AT SIXTEEN years of age, little Tom weighed a hundred and sixty-four pounds in fighting-togs. His father's expert appraisement was that the youngster would scale two hundred before attaining his full growth.

"And at two hundred pounds," reflected big Tom, "that kid will lick the world."

Almost every day since the presentation of the infant boxing-gloves, little Tom had been in training. While yet a child, he had been crammed so full of fistic craft that it was instinct with him. Little Tom didn't have to think while boxing; he did the right thing because it was right. He was a sparring machine.

At sixteen years of age he was entered in the local amateur championships. The result was intensely amusing. He was lightning on his feet, packed a knock-out wallop in either hand, and proved himself a master of ring-strategy.

At seventeen he weighed ten pounds more and annexed the amateur heavyweight crown in the national tourney. At eighteen he scaled two hundred pounds—and retained his title with ridiculous ease. Sport-writers nodded sagely.

"A block off the old chip," said one. "He's got everything the old man had—plus!"

Tom Ferguson, senior—"Old Tom" he was called then affectionately—was thirty-seven years old when the youngster fought his first professional fight at the age of eighteen. The old champion took his son to a Middle-Western city for his initiation and stacked the lad up against a fourth-rater. Mary Ferguson went with them, and all day long battled valiantly against her almost hysterical nervousness. Twice she locked herself in her room and gave way to tears. She was proud—oh, very proud!—but in all these years as the wife of a fighter she had never lost her timidity. It was something innate—something which she could not help any more than she could help loving her husband and adoring her magnificent son.

The bout ended in the third round. Young Tom was a human streak—in, out, in again; smashing his blows home from every angle and any distance—blocking, covering, countering—occasionally fighting furiously wide open. But never hit. The referee stopped the fight to save Ferguson's opponent from unnecessary punishment. It went into the records as a technical knock-out.

For six months there was rigid training with old Tom, and a series of battles against mediocre—but veteran—heavyweights. Young Tom's professional record was an unbroken line of kayoes—that is, until he met Battling Carrigan.

om was nearly twenty years of age
he faced Battling Carrigan. He
ied two hundred pounds stripped to his
pink flesh. He was beginning to be
nized in the fistic world as a heavy-
t phenom. It was agreed that already
as the cleverest and speediest big
who had ever crawled between the
, that he packed a wallop with suffi-
sting to have flattened the best of the
me punch-eating gladiators.

Carrigan fight took place in Jersey
Old Tom and young Tom were
nely confident. Even the sight of his
ent caused him no apprehension, and
s saying a good deal.

rigan was, in appearance, all that the
ate believe every fighter to be. His
was evil, his nose flattened gro-
ly, both ears scientifically cauli-
d, jaw a trifle out of alignment.
normous chest was covered with
matted hair; huge, apelike arms
with knotty muscles. Carrigan was
g puncher.

he first four rounds, young Tom was
g flash—feinting the battler into
knots, then straightening him out
oks and jolts to his jaw and body.
was wagered at the ringside that the
would not answer the call for the
round. Old Tom crouched outside
s at young Tom's corner, grinning
heshire cat.

fifth round it happened—purely by
, but it happened, nevertheless.
n feinted with his left, stepped in
ght cross to body, and Battling
, nearly out on his feet, swished a
right uppercut to the point of the

Tom went back on his heels, brain
, temporarily dazed. Instinct—
of fifteen years of instruction—
n into a clinch. And in the clinch
lesperately.

s hurt—hurt badly—stung for the
in his fighting career.

corner, old Tom saw and under-
lis heart sang as the lad dropped
inch—he marveled that the boy
is feet.

n take 'em!" exulted the father.
w would have put me down and
at my best!"

ll! Young Tom flopped on his stool, a new inquiring, very strange light in his eyes. Old Tom worked over him expertly, massaging knees and stomach.

"Just accident, son. Couldn't happen again in a million years. You've got him—just jab him off this round. Then in the next—finish him. He's a goner."

Young Tom followed instructions. But in the seventh round he paid no heed to his father's instructions that he wade in and finish his man. A new and terrible feeling possessed him. The pain of the wild uppercut—and the effects of it—had passed. But he could not forget.

Young Tom Ferguson was afraid!

He tried to uncover and fight as he had fought up to the fifth round. He knew that it could not happen again, knew that he had Battling Carrigan whipped. But memory of that punch begot an apprehension which made his almost craven covering a reflex action.

And old Tom, watching from the corner with glittering eyes, saw, diagnosed—and understood. He was not angry; he was only sorry—very, very sorry.

"The kid's timid," he communed sorrowfully. " 'Taint that he ain't game—he's just timid.

He advised between rounds in a quiet, insistent voice. The boy went forth to battle for each new session fired with determination to stand the gaff and swap punch for punch. But something which was mightier than his own muscles kept him on the defensive—nerves aquiver, splendid body vanquished by an inherent weakness.

Sport-writers the following morning proclaimed the battle a draw. They remarked wonderingly on young Tom's reversal of form following a single stinging punch. But none of them guessed the truth. Only old Tom Ferguson was able to put it into words—and he did that in the sanctuary of his room behind locked doors.

"The kid is afraid," he reflected. " 'Taint his fault. He inherits it from his mother."

EIGHT months passed. Young Tom's record of ring achievement assumed an imposing appearance. But his matches were all against men noted for their cleverness and lack of punching ability. Against them young Tom showed as a champion of champions. But old Tom was not deluded; he knew that the heritage was there—not a lack of gameness, no absence of stamina, but a simple physical inability to drive himself within range of a grueling fighter. A second battle with Carrigan proved that the youngster was content to hang on, stall off, and jab at a distance through fifteen rounds to a favorable decision.

TWO nights later, old Tom made a suggestion.

"You're gettin' awful good, son."

"Thanks, dad."

"There ain't but two or three heavies worth fightin' now."

"Yes, sir."

"I was thinkin' "—the older man tried to make his tone casual—"of matchin' you for a fifteen-round bout against Sam Norris."

He saw the boy wince, observed that his eyes closed, then opened—as though under the impact of a blow.

"Sam Norris?"

"Uh-huh." Old Tom was infinitely patient; he knew that the hour for threshing out the matter nearest his heart had arrived.

"He—he hits an awful hard blow, don't he, dad?"

"They say he's the hardest hitter who ever stepped into a ring, son. But I don't think he packs a harder punch than you."

"I've never seen him myself," hazarded the boy. "But if he hits that hard——"

"You've got to lick him, Tommy, before the champ will give you a fight."

"I could lick the champion," proferred Young Tom eagerly.

"Uh-huh—sure you could! But we'll have to fight Norris first—eh?"

Silence fell between them. A slow flush dyed the lad's cheeks, and he showed his gameness by looking his father full in the eyes.

"I'm sorry, dad—I can't."

"Can't what?"

"Fight Sam Norris."

"Why?" Old Tom liked his son's directness.

"Because"—and it was patent that the confession wrenched the very soul of him—"I'm afraid of Sam Norris."

Old Tom hitched his chair closer and placed a hand on his son's knee.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, my boy."

"Glad?"

"Yeah. I've known you were afraid of a puncher—ever since that first Carrigan fight. But you've made me feel sort of good—by admittin'——"

"Then you must understand"—the boy spoke with passionate eagerness—"how I feel. It isn't that I'm afraid of Norris or Carrigan or any other slugger. If I was I'd die when I answered the first gong—I ain't afraid—I keep on telling myself that I can lick 'em, trying to drive myself in—to slug. But I can't do it—there's something—something I can't explain—that holds me back. I get cold; my muscles won't work. I guess, after all, dad, I just ain't game. The very idea of taking a beating—a real beating—sickens me. I—I—" He paused, then went on bravely—"It makes me feel as though I was going to faint."

Old Tom's mind flashed back to the night when Mary had fainted at the ringside—Mary, proud of him as a man and a fighter—Mary, who didn't understand what made her faint—Mary, who loved him and gloried in his career and his achievement—but whose timidity was little short of terror.

"That's it, son. I understand—sure I do! But you only *think* you can't take a lacin'."

"I can't—I know I can't——"

"Sure you can!"

"It ain't in me."

"It *is* in you. Bein' my son, I know the right stuff is there."

"If I only thought so—but you don't know how I felt when Carrigan hit me. I was willing to take a beating, but I couldn't open up—not if my life depended on it. Something made me fight a yellow fight—something that was a heap stronger than I was. Oh, I know it sounds silly to you——"

"No; it don't sound silly, son. I understand just what you mean. But you're wrong, boy; you're wrong. You've got the guts—but you don't know it. And you never will know it until you've stood toe to toe with a slugger and licked him at his own game—just battered him down by takin' his punches and slammin' your own home. Once you do that, boy, you'll always have what you say you ain't got now. That's why I want to match you with Sam Norris. He's the greatest of all killin' sluggers. But you can stand flatfooted and lick him——"

"Please! I couldn't fight him."

Old Tom nodded. Two days later he nt into rigid training. But he vouchfed no explanation.

'OR six months, neither father nor son made reference to their conversation. a single occasion the parents discussed Mary shook her head.

'He gets it from me, Tom. The boy 't help it."

'I know he can't, honey. But he's got The lad can take it—but he'll never w that till he once does it. And then— n he's stood it once—he'll never have to it again. I know."

ler eyes were filled with apprehension. What are *you* trainin' for, Tom?"

le kissed her.

I'm trainin' to make our boy the heavy- ht champion of the world, dear. 't that worth while?"

ven old Tom was surprised by the dity with which he rounded into fight- form. He knew—and none better— the old snap had gone from his punch, his judgment of distance was no er uncannily accurate as it had been in old days, that his eye was slower at rning an opening. But he was a d to Jack Britton, welter-weight cham- of the world at thirty-seven, and he only two years older than that superb ior.

young Tom he said nothing of his ose. But he worked out with the lad— stiff work-outs where real blows were nged—the son near to bursting with of his fighting father. Nor was the of Sam Norris again mentioned. young Tom read of the gory achieve- of the great Pacific Coast heavy he had never seen—and newspapers red for a match between the two. he boy's fighting was confined to men—men whom he whipped with nd without danger to himself.

then, one day, old Tom broached the t again.

ere's no one left for you, Tom— Sam Norris and the champ."

lad flushed.

an whip the champion, dad."

u can whip Norris, too."

ıg Tom did not evade the issue.

sir."

"Why not?"

"I'm afraid of him—that is, I'm not afraid, but I am afraid, just the same. Sounds foolish, I know—and you can't understand, but—" And he paused.

"Yes—I understand. But you don't. You don't realize that if you once stood up to that big bruiser—nice chap, Norris is, too; I've known him for years—and swapped punches with him—once you'd stood up to him, you'd have his number and you'd get over this fear of a punch. It ain't your fault, lad—your dad knows that. With the blood that's in you, you couldn't help but be game—once you had to."

The boy was trembling.

"I'll fight him, dad—and do my best—if you say so."

And old Tom shook his head.

"Not with you feelin' like you do."

Three weeks later, old Tom gave a half-holiday to all the helpers round his private gymnasium. And when they had gone, the ex-champion went to the telephone and called a number. Young Tom glanced curiously at his father. He knew that something unusual—out of routine—was about to occur. Old Tom motioned his son to the showers.

"Get into your clothes, Tom."

"Aren't you?"

"No. Not yet."

"But, dad——"

"Do as I say, Tommy."

Dressed, young Tom returned to the gymnasium. His father was seated on an old wrestling-mat, and beside him was another man—a huge, muscular, evil-visaged fellow dressed in too loud clothes. The man was obviously a fighter—more, a bruiser. His battered face gave mute testimony to many grueling battles. Young Tom's expert eye surveyed the stranger's frame. "Two hundred an' fifteen if he weighs a pound."

"Son, I want you to meet a friend of mine; a fine scrapper."

They shook hands. Old Tom spoke quickly.

"You wait here, Tommy—we'll be back in a minute."

The boy wondered as he waited. The atmosphere was surcharged with suppressed drama. Tom seemed out of it, yet in it. There was something which he could not understand, but he knew that his heart was beating too rapidly—and apparently without reason.

The two older men returned from the locker-room, the stranger carrying a new set of five-ounce fighting-gloves, old Tom bearing tape for the hands.

"You bandage us up, Tommy," commanded the father. "We're goin' to work out a little."

A glimmering of understanding penetrated the boy's brain. He compressed his lips and went silently about his task of bandaging the fighters' hands. It was not until they demanded that he lace on the gloves that he put his doubt into words.

"What are you going to do, dad?"

The older man answered very quietly:

"This man is a friend of mine, son. What happens here this afternoon will never be known beyond these walls. And what I'm gonna do—I'm gonna fight him, fight him to a finish——"

"Good God, dad, he'll half kill you! He's forty pounds heavier, and younger."

"Sure he's gonna lick me, son! That's what he's here for. You see, my boy, I've always told you about the blood that's in those veins of yours. It's my blood—and the stamina you've got is my stamina. You've never seen what it is. You think you can't take punishment—you don't know that you couldn't be a son of mine and not do it. And this afternoon I'm gonna let you sit back in that corner yonder and see your father—a man with the same name that you've got—take a beatin' that'll open your eyes. When he's finished with me, my boy, you'll know that anybody named Tom Ferguson can take a classic licking—and go down grinnin'."

The lad protested wildly:

"It ain't fair, dad! I ain't going to let you do it."

"Yes, you are, son. You can't help yourself. I'm gonna teach you that any Tom Ferguson is game—game right to the core."

Cold perspiration stood on the boy's forehead.

"Let me fight him—I'll be game."

"Sure you would, Tommy; sure you would! But that wouldn't do you any good. You'd be game, and you'd take your lickin' —but you'd be scared all the time. And what I'm drivin' at is to show you that there ain't nothin' to be scared of. Once you know the stuff that's in you, son—once you see it with your own eyes—you'll lick the world. See?"

The boy didn't see; the thing impressed him as a nauseatingly unnecessary ordeal. But his protests were unavailing.

"You're timekeeper, son—and I want this fight run on the level. We're gonna fight three-minute rounds, one minute rest, protect ourselves at all times. And we're gonna fight to a finish. And my orders to you, Tommy—a square deal—and don't butt in."

The youngster nodded grimly as he took his place outside the ropes. The two fighters stood in the center of the ring, chatting amiably—real friends—good fellows both. It was absurd, utterly absurd, to think that within half a minute or so they would be at each other in a finish fight—to battle until one or the other of them lay unconscious.

Old Tom grinned into his friend's eyes.

"Ready?"

"Uh-huh."

"All right, son—the gong!"

THEY were at it—young Tom, heart thumping wildly, fists clenched, muscles of his jaw rigid, sat humped forward in his ringside chair, eyes riveted on the picture.

From the bell it was plain that this was to be no sparring-match. The fighting-expression of old Tom Ferguson appeared for the first time in years. His opponent took on an evil scowl. They circled warily.

Then, for four lightning-fast rounds, old Tom showed his son the stuff of which he was made. The veteran warrior was in and out, fighting like a streak—jabbing, hooking and uppercutting—slamming in his punches with more than a hint of his old-time killing power—a master of ringcraft at all times.

And the stranger stood flat-footed and absorbed all the punishment which the veteran handed out, drank it into his cast-iron system—a figure indomitable, purposeful, hopelessly stolid and unyielding. Young Tom experienced a wild desire to scream—even at that stage of the fight the termination was as inevitable as death itself.

Between rounds came the metamorphosis, for at such times the two fighters were friends again—grinning cheerfully at nother. Then the gong again—and a nption of the vicious fighting.

t until the seventh round did the pace . to tell on old Tom. Then, slowly and , he slowed up; his arms were tired— very tired. And inexorably the ger bored in, crouched wickedly, arms close over solar plexus and jaw, huge y frame weaving, weaving, fists slam- venomously from a few inches.

the ninth round Tom went down. he ring veteran that he was, he took unt, rose, slid into a clinch. Exerting perior strength, the stranger shook him -then stepped in and shot a right to ort ribs and hooked a vicious left to e. When old Tom rose, the canvas imson.

n then on, the spectacle ceased to ble a fight. It became a veritable ter. Young Tom could not believe e fighters were friends. The stran- s a fiend—evil, deliberate—cutting er man to pieces, chopping him with jolts to the face, ripping home killing and lefts to the weakened body. Tom leaped into the ring.

p it! He'll kill you!"

out of here, son." Old Tom spoke fficulty through lips thick and swol- bloody. "Get out—and remember e man who is takin this lickin' is Tom Ferguson!"

ugh the remainder of the battle the t outside the ropes. He saw his attered and bruised and bleeding, ng about the ring—going down ow and then but rising to the spur of uenchable courage, facing the bat- merciless punches, fighting back k, puny, helpless, noble way. It until the sixteenth round that old rguson remained on the canvas r the solemn count of ten.

tranger lifted him in his arms as e were a baby and carried him to sing-room. He laid old Tom on ge and found the eyes of young ning menacingly into his.

back into that ring," breathed g man fiercely. "I'm going to kill hat!"

ranger's answer was inexpressibly most fatherly.

n; not now. That isn't what your nts. He isn't interested in what you do while you're mad—and, besides, I'm kinda played out myself—after this here fight. Wait until next week."

"You'll fight me here—this way—next week?"

"Yes, Tommy," came the kindly answer.

Young Tom looked down upon the bruised form of his father. The older man was struggling back to consciousness. And young Tom wanted to weep. As through a haze, he heard the words of the stranger:

"Not a yeller bone in his body—Tom Ferguson hasn't!"

A NEW dignity appeared to settle on the shoulders of young Tom Ferguson during the week which followed. He seemed to have matured very suddenly. There was a new squareness in the set of his fine jaw, a steadiness of eye reflecting tenacious purpose.

He avoided his father as much as possible. Of course they couldn't work out together. For three days old Tom lay in bed, administered by Mary Ferguson—tender, solicitous, understanding. And so, silently, almost fiercely, young Tom trained with Kayo Gorman, a hefty middleweight who was a protégé of old Tom.

No reference was made to the forthcoming battle between young Tom and the stranger. And if young Tom was afraid, he did not show it. True, he was dogged in his training; there was something sinister in the way he mauled the heavy bag. And on Tuesday night young Tom made his first reference to the fight.

"To-morrow afternoon at three o'clock, dad."

"He's an awful punisher, son."

"I know it."

"He's going to hit you hard—and often."

"Yes, sir."

"All right, Tommy—three o'clock to-morrow."

That was all. At two-forty-five they met in the gymnasium—the evil-visaged stranger and the two fighters who bore the name of Tom Ferguson. There was little said as they undressed and allowed old Tom to bandage their hands and tie on the fighting-gloves. Then the father climbed out of the ring and left them together.

"To a finish?" asked the youngster briefly.

"Uh-huh."

ody's Magazine, September, 1922

"Protect at all times?"

"Yep."

"All right. Dad, we're ready!"

The gong! They sparred at long range. The stranger stepped in suddenly and uppercut for the jaw—an unusual procedure this early in the battle. The intent was deadly. Young Tom backed away—then stepped in swiftly and jabbed three times. They sparred again.

The first round was all Tom's. So, too, were the second and third. As yet the stranger had not landed cleanly; he seemed unable to locate the phantom boxer. But in the fourth round he fell into his close, protected pose and started weaving in. A temporary feeling of faintness assailed young Tom as he set himself and tried to hook and uppercut through the other's guard. And then——

The stranger was inside, and it seemed as though young Tom's ribs had caved in. He gasped with the sheer agony of it. His knees trembled. He fell into a clinch. But the other man ripped free and shot home another and yet another of his smashes to the midriff. The boy staggered away, his head cloudy—vague blackness beckoning. He wasn't afraid, and yet he did not *want* to keep his feet.

The stranger dropped his hands and turned toward old Tom.

"Guess it wasn't no use, Tom. The kid just ain't there."

Old Tom Ferguson said nothing. He sat forward, clutching the lower rope in both hands—a pitiful prayer in his eyes.

THE mind of the boy reverted to the scene of the previous week—his father bruised and battered and bleeding, down and up and down again, but always coming in for more. A new fearless coldness came to him, and the son of old Tom spoke.

"I'm coming after you!"

He didn't do much in the remainder of that round, but in the fifth he set himself to the stranger's vicious, protected, weaving attack. And then he deliberately took the first crushing blow of his opponent—took it and winced and wondered that he did not go down—and set himself flat-footedly and shot his right home to the body, his left to the side of the head and his right to the jaw.

The men stood toe to toe and mixed, fought a rally which was superb. Neither would give an inch of ground; both stood punishment which would have flattened any but a superfighter. And into the heart of old Tom Ferguson there came a great gladness.

Through the sixth round and the seventh there was nothing save the thud of glove against flesh. Rip! Smash! Rip! The youngster stood motionless, taking all that the stranger had to give, content to exchange punches. It was a glorious fight.

The beginning of the ninth round found both men hardly able to stagger to their feet. They met in the center; they were at it again—toe to toe, bodies bent at the waist, no thought save to hit and be hit until one went down—and out.

Young Tom was fighting in a daze. He had long since lost consciousness of pain. He didn't even know that his right hand was swollen and out of shape—but he did know that he was not afraid, that something within him greater than himself kept him at it—ceaselessly at it—no thought in his mind save that this man must go down—go down and stay down.

And in the eleventh round the stranger sank to the floor. It was not a spectacular knock-out; no single punch which did the work. It was merely that the giant frame could not stand another blow, that the courageous brain no longer commanded the weakened body.

The lad stood looking down at his bleeding opponent. And then, as old Tom carried the beaten stranger to his corner, young Tom sat down suddenly upon the floor—just sat there and stared, knowing that he, too, had been taxed beyond his physical limit. Then the arm of old Tom was round the boy's shoulders, assisting the lad to his feet, and there were tears in the father's eyes.

"I knew it, son; I knew it! The stuff is all there, Tommy—all there." Young Tom nodded. "And let me tell you, son; the man you have just whipped is Sam Norris—*the* Sam Norris. I paid him for these two fights—and nothin's to be said outside. But, son, you've licked the greatest slugger in the world! I was afraid to tell you it was Norris."

And the puffed lips of young Tom Ferguson expanded into a pain-twisted smile.

"That's all right, dad. I've known it for the past three days."

Concluding Chapters of
the Great Human Story of a Woman

A FLASH OF GOLD

David at Last Learns the Truth about Nan; the Kerrigan Street Strike Fails. Crushed, He Takes Refuge in Flight and in New Work. The Redemption of a Woman and the Discovery of a Man

By Francis R. Bellamy

Illustrations by C. H. Taffs

Begin this serial with any instalment. *The story is here up to this issue.*

VAS late in April when Nan realized
lly just how near to the breaking-
int she and Forrester Stone were.
ow had things ever come to such a

she been wrong to marry David
er? No! Her heart, her every in-
ld her "No." She had loved him;
d him still. He was a dear. He
hings in her, reached to depths that
er invaded by Forrester, that had
en approached by any other man.
v Van Wyck had feared something
. She could see that clearly
ow—understand, better than ever
r father's distrust of her. He had
r weakness—known it because he
wn her mother, she supposed.
dn't really helped her; he had just
she would go wrong. Just as
dn't helped her.

n't thought much of her, really.
her. But he had taken her from
d luxury and comfort and planted
Brotherhood House in Kerrigan
le had been blind to her weariness
r sufficiency, to him, of his work
ng the poor. Since the great clothing strike, it had been worse. And he was fighting her father and Stone, really, in that; he was relieving the strikers of worry for their children, and strengthening them. She could understand that; but she could understand Forrester Stone's resentment, too.

And so, through this break and that in the routine, through lunches with Breck Addams and tea-dances at the Georgian, she had gone on to the tumultuous, swelling rush of her passion for Forrester Stone and his for her. And—after months—was no nearer to a decision than she had been in the beginning. Unless to drift, through the sheer mastery of senses over spirit, into something final, more final than kisses, than stolen hours together, were to serve for a decision! She loathed that thought—shrank from it.

Again and again she had trusted to the help of circumstances, and again and again they had failed her. Forrester was in Clewesbury, working with her father and other capitalists in the organization of United Clothing. By Christmas, his work should have been done. So she had steeled herself to hold out until Christmas,

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when he must go back to New York. And then the strike had come, and Forrester had had to stay. And David—David, for whom, in a way, after all, she was fighting, that she might not hurt him—was helping to keep alive the strike that kept Stone here!

She and Stone were sitting out dance after dance at the Everdells' ball for the Fund for French Wounded.

"It's beyond bearing, Nan," he told her in the shadow of the broad stairs.

"I know it," she said, staring at her fan somberly.

"But you can't know it," he said, with feeling. "You're always engaged in thinking of David, thinking of David—always thinking of David! And it is spring now, not Christmas."

She did not take offense at that.

"He's got to be thought of," she said simply.

"But you don't think of me," Forrester replied. "You don't spare me. I can't stand that forever."

"I know it," she admitted.

"I've been patient—God knows!"

"Yes—you have."

"And it hasn't been the easiest thing to do. I don't want to just see you at dances. I want you—want to own you——"

"Sh," she said. "You mustn't say that, Forr."

"It's true," he said doggedly.

"Don't think it!" she cried in a low tone. "Don't you see what it makes of me——"

"It doesn't make me anything except your lover—and you mine."

She closed her eyes and bit at the handle of her fan.

"Don't, Forr!" she commanded.

"That ought to be the title of our relationship," he said bitterly. "Just 'don't.'"

"I wish it could," she said bitterly.

He stared at her doubtfully.

"Why do you say that?"

"Isn't it plain enough?" she cried. "Do you think I like my rôle—enjoy deceiving David——"

"Just David," he interjected cynically.

"Well—denying—you," she added in a tiny voice.

"Do you love me?" he asked abruptly.

"I—I don't know," she said honestly.

"Do you want me—the way—I do?"

She stood up suddenly.

"You shouldn't ask," she said.

"But I do!" he said at once. "I don't care or know anything except you. What is it to me if Carpenter saw you first—that's all it means. Twenty-one! What did you know about disposing of your whole life—with your nature?"

She turned and stared at him, her eyes dark gray just flecked with tiny grains of gold.

"If you know my nature so well," she said, "I should think that would make you doubtful of me."

"No," he said decisively. "I would not keep you an instant after you felt you wanted to go. I would begin by giving you all your own money. You could choose—at any hour of your life. I would take that chance."

"And how about you?" she asked suddenly. "How about my chance?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Couldn't you hold me?" he asked.

SHE pondered that as they drove out of the Everdells' grounds into the cold night air a little later and Forrester turned the motor north with a little smile at her.

"Just a few stolen minutes," he told her softly.

No; it wasn't a question of holding people's emotion, she decided. It wasn't a question of society's arrangements, or one's own money, or—or anything like that. It was a personal question—whether you could hurt a person like that—David or any one else—anybody you liked well enough to marry.

"I don't think we'd better, Forr," she said.

He stopped the motor slowly in a shadowy place.

"That's silly," he said at once. "There isn't the slightest reason why not."

"Except that I want to go home!" she cried.

"No matter what I want," he said, with a touch of anger.

"Forr!" she said, touching his arm.

"Yourself! And what you want!" he said heatedly.

"Just what's best," she said tremblingly.

"For David!" he cried again. "But not for me—every one but me—why, you don't love me—or you would think of me—sometimes—just once." He turned toward her. "You drive me mad, Nan—"

ok her in his arms fiercely. Then
her from him angrily. "But you
care—you are thinking just of your
of it—David's side of it! Never

started the motor abruptly, swiftly.
take you back—for good. Perhaps
ould be best, anyhow!"
n't say that!" she cried.
time I did say it," he answered

pected pain shot through her at the
ent, too, so that she clenched her
rather than reply. But to reply
be to beg him to go on, she knew.
must not do that—not even if she

ppose so," she breathed finally.
hat all you care?" he asked grimly.
hesitated just a second—perhaps
he was at the wheel. And then
g her arms about him.
t's what I care!" she cried.
're crazy, Nan," he said, as he
the car again.
I can't bear to have you go away
t!" She saw some one across the
nd sanity returned to her. "Start
Forr!" she cried. "I see some one."
eyed at once.
couldn't bear to end in a quarrel,"
somberly. He did not speak,
until there stood in front of them
t Brotherhood House.
then," he said inscrutably, "we
d till to-morrow."
ng as it isn't to-night," she agreed.

ressed his hand and ran up the
steps a little uncertainly, and was
next instant in the little hallway,
eady in her heart over her weak-
hy hadn't she quarreled after all?
d the pain of the thing? What
matter with her she never could
climax came?
ened the door at the top, in her
rious conviction that David was
Yes; he was smoking over by the
shioned desk, his eyes intent upon
papers spread out before him.
Treasure!" he said, without
und.
econd she hesitated, standing in
of the lamp. Then she crossed
ftly and ruffled his hair, her heart filling with that sudden tenderness she could not account for.

"Hello!" she said. "What's the gran'pa doin'?"

"Looking over the accounts," he answered.

"You're crazy, Dave!" she said. "It's nearly two o'clock."

"I know," he answered, leaning back and taking her hand. "But Breck called me up from the *Press* office. Congress is going to declare war to-morrow."

"Is that so?" she said, without the least trace of surprise.

"Yes. Breck is going to try for a commission right away."

War! A commission! War! She sat down on the divan, staring at him with wide-open eyes.

"Is that why you have the papers out?"

"Yes," he nodded.

"Oh!" she said. "But you can't go, Dave—can you? With this position—and the strike and—and everything?"

She meant it, of course, mostly as a request for reassurance. But David waited only an appreciable instant.

"That's just what I've been trying to decide," he said.

Illogical emotion seized her. David go to war! When there had never been any question of it! When there were so many others! When he was older!

"But men your age needn't go—need they—men with wives?"

To her immense relief, he laughed a little.

"You mean they probably won't need the grandpas? No," he said.

"No," she agreed. What would happen to her, indeed, if he ever went away? Sudden fear took possession of her. "Would you like to go?" she added. Her eyes had an indescribable look in them.

"Yes," said David; "I would."

"And leave me?"

"In spite of that, Nan," he said. He rose and stared into the fire. "After all, it's my country. Somebody has to go. And there aren't any too many doctors. I'm obligated in a way by the base-hospital unit, too."

"I know, Dave—" she began. Her hands were curiously tense. "It's fine to want to go. But——"

Well, she wanted to say that there were other things than countries to think of, other things than strikes to consider. There were wives and love and passion. There was the obligation of husband to wife, of lover to sweetheart. Didn't it mean anything to him to leave her? When it would be the end of the world for her? When she would be left alone, to fail him forever.

But the words died on her lips. No; somehow she had forfeited the right to say that. A curious wave of self-contempt swept over her.

"Well, don't consider me, Dave," she said abruptly. "Just do—do what you think is right."

LIKE a giant firecracker that bursts with a fine bang and then is succeeded by unexpected calm and silence—that was the way the war came to Clewesbury. The actual conflict was over three thousand miles away, Clewesburyians told each other over their breakfast-coffee as they read the big head-lines. No one could fight at such great distance. And then, down on Kerrigan Street, two armed company detectives and a striker engaged in a duel to the death, and Clewesbury woke to the realities of life once more. Why, that strike was still going on! The leaders of it were dangerous men, too, with all the subversive ideas on free love and communism that threatened the Russian revolution with tyranny if ever Kerensky lost his hold. Fechter's ideas were plain enough in the pamphlet he gave his unions to read and called it education. Just the extracts in the press were enough to convince any one of that. The thing was the old story—of dangerous agitators and leaders bamboozling the working men, taking bribes and blackmailing honest, sincere employers. It was time for a state investigation. The thing couldn't go on!

An investigation of the unions—that was the thing! And jail for a few of the leaders. That was better than arbitration.

"Good God, do they believe all such mush?" David asked Breck in the grill-room of the Lotos Club.

"Most of it," admitted Breck.

"Do you?"

"Some of it."

"But I know Fechter," said David earnestly. "He hasn't seen a copy of his boyish pamphlet in fifteen years—since he worked in Wales—until some one reprinted ten thousand copies. The Amalgamated has no money for pamphlets to-day. Who did it?"

In the pleasant grill, Breck stirred uneasily.

"But why don't they forget it and go back to work?" he argued. "The time for this stuff is past. We've gone to war. I wonder Van Wyck doesn't call a halt on you."

"Because he doesn't dare," retorted David. "Would he starve the kids for his damned United? The whole thing is a drive on the unions—that's all."

"You sound like an agitator yourself," Breck said coolly.

"I saw it begin," retorted David.

He went out of the pleasant grill with a faint mist in his eyes, through which the face of Fechter seemed to grin—vague, shadowy. Only, Breck's words, as they parted on the corner, made him realize how compelling he must have sounded.

"I'm afraid you're making a mistake, old man," Breck said then, running his hand across his forehead and making his curly hair stand out at the proper angle. "There's nothing in this championing-the-masses stuff. It's only one thing out of many in life—and the other things will outweigh it in time for you. You can't leave your own kind and be happy, Dave."

"I don't propose to abandon Fitzhugh Street and Congress Avenue."

Breck stared at the passing traffic thoughtfully.

"But did it ever occur to you, Dave, that Congress Avenue might abandon you?"

"No," said David at once.

It wasn't reasonable, either, he thought as he took his way past the square and over the railroad bridge. Breck didn't feel the thrill of certain kinds of achievement, somehow. That was why he felt the way he did! But Breck wasn't America.

It was more amusing than anything else, indeed—the new-found patriotism which possessed many of his friends since the war-fever had swept in a belated gust over Clewesbury. They had adopted a slightly superior tone, one by one, as they decided what they would do. And yet war-patriotism was better than no patriotism at all. Surely he shouldn't cavil at that. He ought to be glad that Tom Harding and Billy Kanter had decided to stick to the ospital unit and go, even though there did eem to be a rather large doubt in their inds whether the government would draft em away if they did not go.

The only thing that amused, perhaps, was eir new attitude toward him.

"I can stand that," he told Breck. "I've t my job cut out for me."

"If people only understand it," Breck id, with slightly lifted eyebrows.

"Good God, they can understand starving ildren—can't they?"

But Breck just shrugged his shoulders is time. His own commission was secure d on the way now.

There showed a contradiction someere, somehow, that he should have to y upon Kerrigan Street in order to follow t same ideal for which Breck was going Washington, and Kenny Watson and orge Thomas to France. That was really the thought that David was giving his own personal reputation in those s of the early summer. And yet the dences of his monsterhood were becomquite unmistakable by that time, had been looking for them in the least. y showed themselves in the way that ple plainly shunned him; in the gradual ppearance from Dr. Musson's appeals St. Peter's of any mention of the k that our dear Dr. Carpenter was g, and finally in the confidential regret Mrs. Edmunds expressed to friend friend as she voiced her disappointt over the course Dr. Carpenter seen fit to pursue—the Brotherhood se, which should prevent strikes and ich immoral things, actually supporting She had heard that he was a socialist, -and in Germany they were responsible tting the kaiser go to war.

was the Clewesbury *Press*, however, h first noticed his horns. Labor should t its profits, the paper asserted, and go rk. No one could do labor a poorer e than to pretend that Clewesbury d with any favor on its pretensions—t which certain reformers might do o ponder unless their aims had blinded to any sense of justice. No amount ateur doctors could change the basic mic facts against which the strike un its head. Nothing could be more nerican than to give support to what ractically the enemy—seeing every hand would be needed to win the conflict.

To which David wrote an open letter that the Brotherhood House was only concerned with starving children, and if arbitration would accomplish the end sought for, the Brotherhood House would support arbitration—which would also release the brains and experience of many members of the Chamber of Commerce for the war.

But the *Press* did not print his letter—and the horns grew a perceptible inch.

"An empty gesture," Forrester told Nancy when she asked him about it. "Let them go back to work if they think so much of their children. David makes me tired—this pose of his!"

In the Morpeth Terrace library, curious emotion invaded Nancy.

"I don't think it's pose, Forr," she said.

"Don't tell me that!" Stone's voice hinted of irritation. "Don't you suppose he likes being the head of the Brotherhood House? Of course he does! He wouldn't give up his job for all the strikers in the world. It's his bluff, his game—feeding children! It doesn't cost him anything."

"But why shouldn't he?" she asked.

"Because his stockholders aren't behind him," Stone retorted instantly. "Do you suppose we're such fools as to give aid to strikers when we put up the money from the Federated Charities? Why, I could refuse to sign the checks to-morrow if I thought it was worth it. It hasn't been worth it so far."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because it hasn't made a vital difference," he said. "We'll win without it."

DAVID had not seen any of his old friends of Congress Avenue in two months—not since Breck went to Washington. The telephone-calls he had been wont to receive concerning the pleasures of a little poker game, or once in a while a little foursome at golf—they had ceased, too. And neither Dr. Musson nor Forrester Stone seemed to call any more meetings of the Brotherhood House Executive Committee. They had not done so since the day he had given Fechter the use of the big assembly hall in which to stage his protests against the armed thugs from Pittsburgh which the manufacturers were bringing in as company guards and sheriff's deputies.

The strain showed itself in Stone as the strike dragged its weary length into months and months, and even December saw no apparent end in sight. It was a vindictiveness that was inclusive for Stone—the Brotherhood House and its ever-increasing aid to these strikers' families on Kerrigan Street; the virtuous superiority of David's attitude toward him and all practical employers; the endless inertia of the strike situation in Clewesbury, while affairs called him more urgently every day to New York; the exasperating indecision and temperamental moods of Nancy, with her conclusions that never concluded anything, her decisions that never decided.

Wasn't it possible to get decisions on some of these things? Particularly, was there any reason why he should not force Nancy to his views now?

A clearer perception of his folly, now, in the Man of Destiny—and of the ways of women! Delay, befog, obscure—those appeared to be the favorite verbs in milady's dictionary. Things had not changed a single iota since the Everdell dance months ago—despite all his arguments and efforts and quarrels. He had been afflicted with strange weakness where she was concerned, just blindly following his emotions, letting her lead where she would. He should have used his brains. Intelligence got a man what he wanted in the business world.

What did intelligence suggest?

HE PONDERED that for some days. Then a solution came to him as December snowflakes drifted along the sidewalks of Congress Avenue, blowing in little flurries along the broad asphalt of Cuyahoga Street, straight at the open porches of the General Hospital, where Nancy was taking her Red Cross Nurses' Aid course.

"Yes; I can appreciate your position," he told her rather coolly as he drove her down to the Pontiac. "Living with a man you don't love, eating his food. It must be extremely difficult."

In the quiet of the Pompeian Room, Nancy studied his face intently. Something in him had changed, she was sure.

"What makes you say that?" she asked.

"Isn't it true?"

"The words—yes," she admitted. "But what made you say them?"

"Just a preliminary."

"A preliminary to something unpleasant?" she asked swiftly.

"A preliminary to stating the truth."

"I knew it!" she retorted. "I can always tell. What is it?"

He had counted upon her genius for emotion, however—and discounted it.

"Well, there is a point," he said deliberately, "after which consideration for David becomes injury to yourself. Your own character can't stand it. It becomes the part of the coward. I've just been realizing it. I've been realizing, too, that when you allow him to make a coward and a liar out of you, then you are allowing a situation for which there can be no excuse or issue. And I am the one who is allowing it. Because it is all my fault. I am the one who is making the coward and the deceiver out of you. And I can't have that." He looked up from the fork with which he played. "Not if I love you—and want what is best for you. Do you see?"

She watched him a moment, a curious expression in her eyes.

"You aren't making anything out of me," she said.

"Just as plainly as if you were clay."

She resented that.

"I'm doing it of my own free will."

"But even that doesn't change the fact," he pointed out. "It is just as degrading for you." He drank from his glass. "And I can't have that. It has got to end—and I mean end sincerely, decently." He stared at the table-cloth. "I have some decent ideas and feelings, you know, despite what David and Fechter say of me. I really do love you, you know."

"I know," she said softly. She felt a strange sense of finality in his voice. His unconscious admission that the attacks upon him left a little sting touched her, too, in unexpected fashion. And yet she felt a curious intuition of something hidden, something unexpressed, something he was not telling her about. Her memory groped for an instant, trying to recall a similar sensation. And then she remembered.

That first afternoon he came to the Brotherhood House! The feeling that he might be playing a game as well as she! That was the occasion when she had felt like this. It gave her a desire to be obstinate, although she could find no actual excuse for it.

Why did Stone not leave David to the bitter truth? "As you like," he said slowly. "I've done my part in telling you, anyhow. I'll be going." "Before I throw you out," remarked David.

"There isn't anything new about any of these things," she said.

"No," he agreed. "Only, they are plainer. They have driven me to a point where decision is a necessity if I am to see you. We owe each other a real, honest decision—whether we are to live together after it or never see each other again."

"Yes." She agreed to that.

"Why don't you take two weeks to think it over alone, Nan—and then render a final decision?" he asked.

"Two weeks!" she repeated. His decisiveness appalled her—she who could never decide anything except upon impulse. "I can't do that," she said somberly, after a pause. Visions of embarrassing questions, impossible reasons, telltale answers had crowded upon her.

"Yes, you can!" he exclaimed. "I've thought of that."

"But I've no place to go," she pointed out, taking refuge in detail.

"New York," he answered. "Rhea Winters' house."

"I've no reason for going."

"A visit," he supplied. "A place where you can think by yourself—where you won't see David every hour."

"But—" she began once more.

"You've got to, Nan," he told her fiercely. "We can't go on like this. I'm at the end of my rope. The world has eyes, too. Every day makes the thing much harder, more impossible, more disastrous—destroys everything that makes for happiness for you. We've procrastinated for months—so long that I can hardly believe it, so long that our intentions have almost perished. Good God, we don't want that! Courage is better than that—courage to decide to take the leap. It only takes a minute—and a word!"

"But not to-night, Forr," she begged.

He did not allow her to irritate him.

"All right," he said. "This week——"

"This week," she repeated.

"Saturday," he said definitely. And she did not dispute it.

FOR her, the week that followed was the most incomprehensible week of her entire existence. She did not see or hear from Forrester, and so was ignorant of his lengthy meetings with Edmunds and Van Wyck and of the momentous decisions they came to. And yet she thought of little else except him and David and the almost certain wreck she saw ahead. Like some dark shadow of the mind hung the promise to decide, blotting out everything else, reducing her to a mere automaton. Something vital was bound up with this decision, she felt, even though it was nothing more in itself than a decision to go away and then really decide. A curious conviction in her, so far, that she had been loyal to David—perhaps because she had never planned anything definite and merely drifted with passion's tide. But this would be definite. This would be frank admission that she considered definitely the possibility of being disloyal. What was a war or a strike or a Brotherhood House beside that?

The thought ripped open the conventional seam of her thoughts like a knife. It would mean that she really considered never sitting here again before the pleasant fire in her own chair while David smoked, that she considered turning her back forever on all that they had gone through since the night in the Morpeth Terrace garden.

Like a knife across the whole pattern of friendship and affection of her life so far—that was what it would be.

And yet that was all in the past, she realized abruptly toward the middle of the week. How long could she stand it here now if Forrester were to go out of her life forever? Just these few days alone afternoons showed what the future would be. Could she stand that—did she have the strength? Or would she try it desperately for a few years, only to find out in the end that she could not stand it—and had lost Forrester, too?

She knew she had to do something about it, and perhaps that was why the imps of procrastination won her so easily in the end. Yes; she would go to Rhea Winters. There was nothing final in that. Perhaps, too, in New York, away from everything, the whole affair might take on a different aspect. She might find strength enough to arrive at some conclusion. It would not be anything irretrievable, at least.

It was, in fact, ridiculously easy, she thought a week later, as she opened Rhea's answer to her letter and read the flashy, black-stroked handwriting she remembered so well from school. Rhea would be crazy to have her come; Rhea would be delighted;

hea would never forgive her if she didn't me; Rhea was making her plans even now have her come. Promise Rhea that she ould come. Right after Christmas.

She did not procrastinate after that.

"I think I'd like to go," she told David in iny voice when he came home for dinner. e felt a tiny flush of shame come over her. ow hateful it was to deceive!

"It will do you good," David said at ce. "I only wish I had thought of it self. You don't ever think I have forten about you; do you, Nan," he asked, cause I am so infernally busy?"

'Why—no," she protested.

e stood up suddenly and came over and k her in his arms.

'You're too sweet for words to me, child!" said.

No," she said in a low voice.

You are!" he said in their tone of imita- childish quarrel.

I wish I could be," she said suddenly. l she buried her face in her hands of a den while he stood above her, mystified.

You are!" he repeated.

Don't say it again!" she cried. She felt need of explanation at once. "I'm tired nervous, I think," she said. "It's too h Clewesbury."

nd too much Kerrigan Street," said id. "The place is like a mined field days."

es," she agreed.

was two days later that she told ster.

'ONDER can I ever convey to you all e grim foreboding and disheartening ction, the nervous expectancy and er emotion of those last three days ineteen-seventeen, while gradually the a of Kerrigan Street rose to its climax, nside the walls of the Brotherhood belief and temptation struggled to eath, oblivious of the tragedy outside indows.

e watching two distinct dramas it was rrester Stone—two dramas, to each of he held the key, and so rather de- the players. No touch of pity in or David! Rather a sense of satis- at the achievement of one more , one more step on the road of y which he had surveyed for himself. oking-off of this Brotherhood House would do two things also. It would kill off immediately any chance of this David Carpenter's rising to any place of influence, and it would end the strike. Public opinion was against these strikers already. All chance for them would die, once this place ceased stirring up hornets' nests, once people were given a chance to forget. The strike would be enveloped in a silence like the tomb then. And that would do the work. Funds were at the vanishing-point already in Fechter's treasury, so Harrigan had reported from his place of vantage on the Labor Council. Six thousand starving children added—and no one knew how many wives—would bring the men to reason for good and all.

Van Wyck had seen that at once, and even Edmunds had agreed, once the necessity had been pointed out to him. For what had they put over the Federated Charities, if not for just such emergencies as this? Carpenter could just resign, or be fired if he really stuck out for a row. Which he wouldn't. It wasn't to a man's interest to do that when nothing of his own was at stake. The thing was as good as settled.

David's first knowledge of the plan came two days later, at the first meeting of the Executive Committee held in four months. He read his reports slowly, oddly aware of the silent, hostile atmosphere about him in the instants when he paused.

"Altogether about twice the budget of the period just past?" Stone commented, with a curiously judicial air.

"At the least," David answered. "Figuring the Consumers' League and the public gifts as equaling their figures—which is doubtful, with all the demands for money and loans which are scheduled."

"Well," Stone said abruptly, "we haven't got the money this year. The Federated Charities can't find it. We're cutting everything in an endeavor to help win the war. We'll have to use the knife, here, too. The Milk Fund for these children, for one thing. We have no real business spending such huge amounts on that. It isn't actually relieving poverty. We're being subjected to severe criticism on that ground, anyway. We can begin with that."

It was David who broke the curious silence, that followed.

"Well," he said, "you might as well cut out the Brotherhood House completely, then." There was no use dodging the issue.

"Oh, cutting budgets always hurts," Dr. Musson palliated smoothly.

"But this will kill," said David.

It was a distinctly arrogant gesture with which Mrs. Edmunds turned and stared at him.

"I don't think I understand you, Dr. Carpenter," she said. "What do you mean when you say it will kill?"

"I mean it will destroy the Brotherhood House just as much as if you tore down the bricks and plaster," he answered.

"Why?" interjected Stone coldly.

"Because it will brand us as the tool of United Clothing," said David quietly.

"What?" Mrs. Edmunds' gasp was plainlu audible.

"The Federated Charities has the money," David pointed out.

"But not for this particular thing." Stone's voice was harsh now.

"Kerrigan Street will believe just one thing," David said. "It will believe that Jonathan Edmunds and Andrew Van Wyck and Adolf Lewisohn control this Brotherhood House body and soul. It will believe that democracy and justice and charity are a farce. It will believe eternally that the dollars you give to this house are soiled with the blood of their children. It will believe that Fechter is right when he says that America is run for the big interests, by the big interests, in the name of the big interests. We can't let six thousand children starve. We'll have to cut somewhere else."

"Their parents only need to go to work," said Mrs. Edmunds quickly. "Do you expect us to aid the strikers?"

"Then, in God's name, why a Brotherhood House?" cried David. Like a flash of fire coming suddenly in a quiet summer sky, that tone from him was. "Why not strip to the garb of Attila and have done with the sloppy mouthings? Have done with Abraham Lincoln and Christ? Tear down your banners of humanity and democracy and brotherhood—and put up your true flag of greed and property and selfishness? Property first! Greed first! Selfishness first! Profits before human happiness! Profits before children! Why not do that?"

Stone was on his feet in an instant.

"Because that is the creed of the strikers," he said angrily. "Because that is the thing we are fighting. Children! They don't care about children—all they're doing is using you, making a dupe of you. They're only out for profits, for wages, for money! Crooks and money-grabbers—over here to make money! That's what they are!"

"Let us call the meeting adjourned," said Dr. Musson heavily.

"By all means," agreed Mrs. Edmunds.

"And the matter settled," added Stone coldly. He looked round. "Unless you consider a vote necessary?"

A vote was not considered necessary.

"Meeting adjourned, then," said Stone coolly.

HE STOOD rather hesitant, nevertheless, at the end of the long table, before his papers, as the others put on their coats.

"I don't think I would do anything rash on this matter, Carpenter," he said, as he buttoned his fur coat tight round his neck. "A few people might agree with you—but not enough to make it worth your while to make any public appeal. Sentiment is against any more charity drives or appeals just now, anyway. Possibly you exaggerate matters down here. Better think it over carefully before our action becomes effective."

"I shall," said David, unmoved.

He did not move once as they departed one by one, an odd hesitation apparent in their manner. Nor did he notice the hand that Forrester held out finally.

"No; let's not befog the issue," he said slowly.

"As you like." Stone shrugged his shoulders as he turned away. "But I'd advise you to think it over, anyway."

Advise him to think it over! Contempt swept through David at the words. Well, thank God, all of Congress Avenue did not feel this way about Kerrigan Street! A public campaign even might be started, and arbitration, not hunger, made the judge of this strike. Before God, he could try that! Fair play for the children of Kerrigan Street, no matter what the industrial dispute! He would carry that slogan from one end of the city to the other.

Nancy never forgot how he announced it

o her at dinner that night, or how he came ome at midnight, his eyes still ablaze.

"The *Press* and *Courier* would not print a ne for me," he said grimly. "Not even s an advertisement. Afraid of your father nd Edmunds and their advertisers." He t his pipe with an improvised taper at the ying fire. "There isn't a hall to be rented this city. Not even Convention. I'd ve a good deal to know what hold United lothing has on the mayor and the chief of lice. They won't even give me a permit r an open-air meeting. John Foster has ned me the Second Presbyterian audi- rium. We'll have our protest meeting ere and begin our campaign. It shows ere we'd be without a fearless church." blew swift clouds from his pipe. "We'll ry this thing before the people if we ve to turn Clewesbury upside down. n going to fight."

ong after weariness and overpowering ire for sleep had come to Nancy, he was l outlining to her, in their bedroom, just at he purposed doing.

O THE end of her life, Nancy never forgot how that resolve of David's filled his waking-hours during those last two s—overshadowing everything else, shut- out her own actions from his conscious- , while he made those endless calls and s and unending visits to newspaper es, to John Foster, to the Consumers' ue. It never seemed to occur to him beneath this fight of his another drama t be going on—that she might be ng his life forever while he gave her ied, casual kisses morning and night. seemed almost as if it would be easier ay on and on, dropping more and more e pretense that was between them until d discovered the truth himself. He in such a world of his own creation he did not see anything except what he ed to see! He only wanted Maria to he dinner early to-night so that he l have an opportunity to go to Fech- mass-meeting and get back before her ght train to say good-by to her.

went down into the Brotherhood after he had gone and stared out into en, icy brightness of the night, only ware presently that a limousine was ng by the entrance until some familiar e suddenly registered itself upon her brain. It was Forrester Stone, she recognized then, with a tiny catch of surprise. What had happened to bring him down here to-night?

"Kitty is coming to take me to the station, you know," she said, as he entered. "Has anything happened?"

"Nothing yet," he answered. "Only, it's incredible that David can be such a fool."

"Fool?" she repeated.

"Yes; as to take this milk thing to the mass-meeting and then to Dr. Foster at the Second Presbyterian—a public meeting—after the committee decided here not to do it. Can't he take a hint? Does he think us such fools as to allow him to carry this thing to the public and still head this Brotherhood House, still keep his hold on this place—after he had joined the fight against us? He struck his hands together sharply. "We're going to break this strike. We'll break David with it, if he makes us. Have I got to say that to him face to face to bring him to his senses?"

"I'm afraid you have," she told him, with a sudden, odd coldness that she could not account for.

"Then I will," he said.

"But it won't have any effect," she told him at once. "You can't break David."

"Can't break him?" There was almost scorn in Stone's voice.

"No."

"Why, I can take him like that!" Forrester had made a gesture with his hands as if he were tearing paper and throwing it away. "I own this Brotherhood House, stone, bricks and mortar. I can throw him out of here to-night! Crush him like an egg-shell!"

"Not the real David," she said quietly. "You couldn't touch him if you threw him out of a hundred Brotherhood Houses. The position does not mean anything to him."

"Don't tell me that! This is his game, his bluff—that's all! Champion of the poor! Bah!"

"But you needn't shout." There was distinct animosity in Nancy's low tone.

"Well, you and I needn't quarrel about it," he said abruptly. "It's nothing in our lives what David chooses to do, I suppose."

"No; I suppose not," she answered in a low tone.

He stared at her an instant.

"I couldn't stay away to-night. I know it isn't easy for you."

The fire faded out of her eyes.

"No, it isn't," she admitted. She sat down on the straight sofa by the fire, looking into the flames. "It's like leaving a child, somehow." She unclasped her hands suddenly and rose, standing by the table. "David should have had some one else—some one who would have had the courage to go into the street with him—and share a crust, if necessary." She looked down at her hands. "He needed only that to be a very fine sort of person—the kind I can never be. I can see that." Her voice trailed off.

"We've been over it all a thousand times, Nancy," he said. "Let's forget it and be happy—and you're tired. You've stood enough, surely. Forget it all for two weeks."

She buried her face in his shoulder at that, an irresistible impulse to tears sweeping over her.

"If I only could!" she cried.

It was the emotion of the moment, probably, that held them spellbound with each other, unaware of the swift, light footsteps outside as Kitty Sassoon came down the hall, pushed open the door and stood an instant inside, her hand on the knob behind her, her lips parted and her eyes wide with the surprise of the scene before her. But neither Nancy nor Forrester noticed her until the door closed behind her with a tiny click and she spoke.

"Nan—are you crazy?"

LIKE an electric shock that was, galvanizing Nancy into sudden action.

"Kitty!" she said. She disengaged herself from Forrester, realizing the futility of explanation. "I didn't hear you."

"Why, if I am *de trop*, of course I'll go." There was a kind of iciness in Kitty.

"Why, Kitty—don't be foolish!"

But Kitty Sassoon stood by the door without moving.

"So that is the idea of New York!" she said. "You aren't satisfied with just flirting any more!"

"And what if I'm not?" Nan cried passionately. "What if I'm sick of the dulness and sordidness and ugliness?" She swept the vista of poverty that lay outside the Brotherhood windows. "What if I see all the color and passion and romance of life die for me down here—where David doesn't even know when I come and go? Am I never to have any existence again?"

So this was no mere flirtation, but incredible folly and passion!

"Why, you are crazy, Nancy!" Kitty said, a trifle aghast.

"What if I am?" cried Nancy defiantly.

"What if you are? It is for Forrester to answer that."

"What do you mean by that, Kitty?" asked Forrester.

"I mean you are stealing another man's wife," said Kitty implacably, "behind his back!"

"I'm forcing Nan into nothing."

"But you are taking her just the same."

"I'm the best judge of that, I think," said Nancy instantly.

"You!" A tone of utter contempt, it was, that Kitty used now. "Why, you are only gratifying your whims—as you always have."

"Kitty!" It was Forrester's sharp voice.

"Well, what else is she doing? Selling herself for New York, for pleasure——"

"When you say that, you lie, Kitty." There was deadly anger in Nancy's voice.

"You mean you don't like the truth!"

"You'll take that back."

"You can't frighten me."

"Kitty, Nan—stop it, I say! In God's name!"

Nancy never forgot the piercing quiet of that instant. For she heard the stamping of shoes outside the street door on Kerrigan Street the next moment, and she knew it was David. Unforgetable silence. Three figures turned to marble were those two women and the man who watched him, too. David! It seemed almost as if none of them would ever have spoken again had not David broken the quiet as he stared absently into the flames, in his eyes that far-away look that never left him again.

"Well, for the first time in my life," he said, "I've seen the truth."

"What do you mean, Dave?" Nancy's voice was barely audible.

"My eyes have been opened."

"Your eyes?"

"Yes," he answered slowly. "I have heard the real truth about you, Stone—and me—and Nancy, and all of us. I've been a fool, a blind fool, a mumbling fool—serving out bottles of milk and dope like some

tan, muttering: 'We all feel kindly
Kindly toward each other. Kindly
our brothers—'" He broke off
ly. "What mockery! When these
and children on Kerrigan Street will
to-morrow rather than accept even
st day's aid from this Brotherhood
"

on't understand." Forrester's voice
steady with the temporary relief.
've accepted it until now."

ause they believed me. Because
ought we stood for America here.
e they didn't know who owns the
hood House, body and soul. But
ow now."

e you gone mad, Carpenter?"

loes sting—doesn't it?" A curious
David's eyes now. "The meeting
my eyes to the thing, the organized
ss of our America, of capital, of
f everything, everybody—equality
rtunity to be selfish, the selfishness
oor glorified by talk of thrift, of the
admiration of success! A whole
ganized to tear out true charity and
unselfishness by the roots, and, by
t succeeding because of humanity's
ecency! Because of humanity's in-
erception that unselfishness is the
e road to happiness!

k of the picture of it! Humanity
by its own petard, but with the
God fighting in it! Fighting in
and Nancy, here, and you and me,
—"

Fechter tell you this?" Abrupt
orrester Stone now, at the sudden
of power in the man before him.
as the reason for that marriage of
This the hidden power! He
ve to stop this at once. "Did
ay this?" he demanded again.

re was the force of a sudden vision
in David at the moment—and
ould ever have stopped that.

r!" he repeated. "No. Fechter
explicit. He accused me of sell-
fe to you every day as the price of
e and my position. Distributing
he called it—for pay!"

" It was almost a cry, that sound
y.

nger and desperation, Nan," he
y. "He didn't see you, know you,
course—struggling against your emotions all your life. Coming down on Kerrigan Street, keeping faith with me through all the dun dreariness of this whole mistake of mine. He has only seen your little escapes from the emptiness of it, your endeavors to keep alive. He hasn't seen the unselfishness that has supported you through it all—that has made you keep faith with me and yourself——"

"Dave!" It was just a trickle of blood that Nancy had seen on his wrist; but the sight struck into her heart like some knife, cutting the unbearable tension and self-accusation of David's words. "Are you hurt?"

"Nothing," he told her.

"But it is something!"

"I warded off the blow."

HE WOULD have dismissed it with that. But she could not stand the anguish of remorse another moment. Like a flash of gold, a glimpse of some wonder-dream, those words of David's—bringing to her just one hint of the answer to existence, one gleam of hope that could light the solution to her own riddle of passion and unhappiness. Unselfishness! That was David's dream, his clue to happiness, his strength and his belief! Why could it not be hers?

David—her David! No one could fail a belief like that!

"But let me dress it," she cried.

"I fixed it," he told her.

"But it needs more!"

"It's nothing, Nan."

"But I want to fix it!" Forrester Stone and Kitty Sassoon might have been two mummies for all the part they appeared to play just then. Just herself and David—that was all the world to Nancy in that instant when she tore the strips from the sterilized package and bound his wrist swiftly.

Only the clock on the wall, indeed, sounding the hour of eleven, tore away the emotional mist of the moment for her—and let into the room the cold, harsh wind of fate, bringing back the present and the facts.

"It's time for the train."

She recognized Kitty's cold voice saying those words. But there was no answering relief in her heart at the prospect they brought up now.

"I'm not going anywhere now," she said scornfully.

"Not—" Stone began the sentence, but never finished it.

"No," she said. "I'm going to stay now."

A full minute Forrester Stone stared at her in the silence, indescribable emotion in his eyes.

"Well, as you choose," he said then slowly. "As you choose."

"I do choose," said Nancy. And this time there was a tiny break in her voice.

NANCY had known the moment David entered the study that she could never leave him. Like something that had grown up without her knowing it, gradually overshadowing everything she felt and yet never making itself known to her while she gazed at her own little drama of passionate conquest—that was what this new feeling for David was. It must have been in her all the time, only waiting its chance to show her its strength and everlasting character. He had had only to look at her with that dim, unseeing look in his blue eyes, and everything else in the world had vanished. Everything except the pathos and belief of him, and his everlasting endeavor to do what was right!

That was what had caught at her throat—yes; and brought the tears to her eyes even here alone in the living-room, where she had gone to wait for the drama to play itself to a finish and give David back to her. If she could just hold him tight to her breast like some little child, and tell him how little it mattered that this Brotherhood House had failed, kiss away his disappointment and failure. And tell him she loved him! Davie! If only he could come soon so she could tell him that!

Just the beginning of a new Nancy—in her soul the first dim glimpse of the eternal things of God.

Waiting there alone, crouched before the fire, she remained in ignorance of the resistless torrent of emotion that was sweeping on Forrester Stone to a final test of strength. It was a torrent that amazed even the Man of Destiny, that emotion which had held him in its grip ever since the moment in the Brotherhood study when Nancy had turned to David and he knew that he had lost. Lost to the preacher, the wind-jamming fool! But he had not lost yet. He had merely come to the last trick, if he could ever bring himself to play it. And he could bring himself to-night!

He was telling himself that over and over again, at that instant, as he directed the chauffeur to the distant house in East Clewesbury and sat back in the limousine watching the winter streets flash by. Nancy could call it brutal if she liked—even a betrayal of confidence. But it was the only thing that would ever free her.

All hesitation vanished as he went through the carved desk in the library of the villa, assembling the little violet-scented missives he sought and putting them into small piles. In some odd way, they seemed to bring some elusive part of Nancy's own personality into the room. Well, getting her in the end would be worth the risk. The only point was to act quickly.

The sound of the telephone-bell out in the paneled hall caught his ear just then as he tied up the last of the little packets. And he hesitated an instant. Who could that be? It wasn't credible it was Nancy, changing her mind. Not to-night.

It was Van Wyck.

"The whole thing is settled." The old man sounded almost exultant over the wire. "Lewisohn just called. He got the whole thing. Contracts for O. D. on our figures, and sliding scale for costs and labor. Cost-plus arrangement—provided we can deliver in thirty, sixty and ninety days. We can let this strike kiss itself good-by until the war is over now."

"We'll have them in the dirt in a week." Stone hesitated.

"Can't help it." Van Wyck's usual succinctness had replaced his temporary exultation. "We'll follow our last week's decision. Close the strike to-morrow — union question left open, wages what they demand. Then put our liberality in the morning editions. Get Fechter and his gang out of their beds if necessary and come to an agreement to-night. On patriotic grounds. Order of the government. You know."

"Yes, I know," retorted Stone. The old man was like a parrot, telling him all these things. Had he forgotten who said them originally?"

In the dimly lit paneled hall, Forrester Stone took out his watch as he closed off the telephone and looked at it with odd, nervous irritation. Eleven-forty now! And

Carpenter had only that meeting at the *Press*, so Harrington had reported. That did not give him time to waste! But, good God, what was the hurry? Fechter and his gang could wait until he was through at the Brotherhood House.

"Kerrigan Street," he said to the chauffeur, ten minutes later. "The Brotherhood House."

Afterward, I think, Stone was glad that he did not know at the time that David had already reached the Brotherhood House. Because he would have considered that his opportunity had already passed in that case, and so might never have carried his fight out to the end. It would never have occurred to him that David could have come in and not sought out Nancy at once, but have stayed down-stairs in the study. And yet that was exactly what David had done.

DAVID hardly heard the footsteps on the icy sidewalk or realized that some one had opened the door—until he looked up abruptly, and saw Forrester Stone.

He hardly welcomed him, either. Behind him now was Forrester and this Brotherhood House. There was no use talking now. Probably a sort of regret in Forrester because of the split—a lingering feeling that after all he was of Congress Avenue and not Kerrigan Street and so was human—and Nancy's husband. Forrester probably bore him no personal ill will, any more than he did to Forrester. But what good could mere words do?

"Hello, Stone!" he said. "What are you doing down here again?"

"Why, I've brought you some documents to read," Forrester said. He fumbled in his inside pocket and threw the oblong, violet-scented packet upon the table between them.

They were letters, David saw as he picked them up—letters in Nancy's handwriting.

"Why, what is the idea?" he asked curiously.

"They are letters Nancy has been writing to me," Stone answered. His dark eyes seemed sunk in his cheeks, but he held himself well in hand. "It struck me to-night that the thing for me to do was to bring them to you."

"Oh, I see," said David, although he did not see. "What has she been corresponding about?"

"Read the letters," said Stone.

He sounded brusk, almost harsh, as if he were at the end of his patience. And his tone gave David his first pang of doubt. There was something here out of the ordinary—something he did not understand, something sinister. What kind of letters were these about enthralment and rapture and conscience? From Nancy to Stone! Not in a garden, pursuing innocent conquest——

"What in the devil have you been doing to Nancy?" he asked.

Like some nightmare, the thing seemed of a sudden—filled with all the past in sickening disarray.

"I've been doing nothing," Stone told him angrily. "She has fallen in love with me. Can I help that?"

In love with him! Momentarily, David felt stunned. And then, in the silence, he almost laughed. Why, the man was mad! Or he didn't know Nancy and her ways. Had she been unable to resist making a conquest, and vanity had interpreted it thus to this man?

"In love with you?" he repeated.

But Stone seemed moved to sudden action now.

"As God is my witness, I didn't bring this thing on," he said, as he stepped swiftly forward to the table. "I don't think Nancy knew what she was doing, what she wanted, either—until it happened. We've tried to end it, tried to forget it, kill it—but you can't end such things. They go on."

He stopped suddenly, aware of the curious expression on David's face, and then he went on:

"She was going to New York to-night—and end the damn thing that way—until this Brotherhood row came up. And she couldn't tell you."

In the silence, a sudden conviction of utter unreality seized David, again. Why, this was nonsense! It was incredible!

"What do you mean by 'end it all'?" he inquired. There was a curious directness in his gaze.

"She wasn't coming back."

"Oh!" said David. He nodded his head slowly, the way old men sometimes do over an unexpected piece of news. "And you?"

The question seemed to snap Stone's

patience suddenly—broke his nerve, perhaps, under the strain of that direct gaze of David's.

"I? Good God, what do you think? Oh, you can think what you like!" he rasped out abruptly. "But there comes a moment when marriage isn't a barrier. I've seen her go through this thing as long as I can. One mistake shouldn't ruin her life. Drudgery and dirt, squalor and neglect—instead of the happiness and things she has a right to—always had before she married you. You've thought you were doing the patron-saint act down here. But she's the one who has done the sacrificing, paid for the fun—the way the woman always does. What kind of life can she ever lead with you? By God, and you knew the kind of woman she was when you married her! Made for Fifth Avenue and Regent Street—not this damned hole. But you'd let her go on to the end rather than look the thing in the face. You'd keep her until she was fifty and worn out. I've seen it for two years. I've come to the end of my rope on it, too. I can't see you take her from here out into some other gutter—not when I can stop it! That's why I brought you the letters—to see what decency you had in you."

"What do you mean by that?"

It was just a simple question but there was a tone in its utterance that gave Forrester Stone a sudden glimpse of deadly peril, that brought to him abrupt realization of his folly, his headstrong folly.

"I mean when I can come to you and lay all the cards on the table," he countered. "When the thing is honest and fair between us, and you understand it. When there is no more of this damnable falsehood and deceit. Do you see?"

Did he see?

Ah, what a silence that was! One, two, three—the minutes ticked themselves off while Stone waited by the table. And then David filled his pipe slowly, and the muscles under his coat relaxed as he stared at Stone in the bare study.

"I do not know what the letters contain, you see," he pointed out in an oddly quiet voice.

"Then read them," said Stone harshly. "They're plain enough."

It was a curiously deliberate gesture with which David gathered up the packet and put it in his pocket.

"I will, when I am alone," he said.

"Meaning that you don't believe me?" exclaimed Stone.

"If I may be allowed a belief in my wife," replied David.

For a moment, the blind faith of the man almost staggered Stone. And then he realized the futility of all words. The letters spoke louder than anything he could ever say—and in a voice the man could not deny. Nothing could change the result now. Why, was it not the part of common sense to call the game over now and let the man face Nancy and give her her freedom? That was what any man did with an unwilling wife—particularly a Don Quixote Carpenter!

Why did he not leave him to the bitter truth?

"As you like," he said slowly. "I've done my part in telling you, anyhow."

"You've done that," agreed David ironically.

"I'll be going."

"Before I throw you out," remarked David.

Just an instant Forrester Stone considered that. And then he turned on his heel and shrugged his shoulders and went out, banging the door behind him.

THERE was no lack of reality about these letters certainly. They were plain enough. David leaned down and picked up the packet again slowly. Just how plain were they?

In the silence he took off the rubber band and laid them out upon the table before him, a kind of dim, unvoiced hope in his heart. Yes; she might have been foolish, of course. Nancy was such an impulsive person. But it was not credible that she was base.

Twenty-three of them there were, he saw as he spread them out. Before God, why had she never told him? The whole thing seemed impossible, looked at in that way.

Little ghosts from the past crowded about his chair as he sat down and opened the first one.

Before God, no woman, Nancy or another, wrote such letters without the intimacy of passion! There had been no exaggeration here. This Stone must have owned her completely, as if she were no wife of his—as if he had never existed.

A silly damn fool meddling in things he did not understand and calling it "democracy" or something! Bitter truth in those remarks of Stone's, in those warnings of Breck's! No; he was no good to any one—never had been since the day he left Fitzhugh Street and his own kind. Selfishness! That was what it had been on his part. Selfishness to the two old women in the house of steep stairs, selfishness to Nancy and all the passion and temptation of her. Satisfying his own desires to do something fine, to be something out of the ordinary in the world, instead of staying where he belonged and doing his best for Aunt Hat and Aunt Susan, for Nancy and her little happiness. Gazing at the stars while Nancy died under his feet. What a record of failure! And the children of Kerrigan Street starving in the end just the same. What in God's name would ever become of Nancy? A child of tragedy, that was what she was!

A little tide of passionate hatred of Stone rose in his heart at that. What did this Forrester Stone purpose doing for her—just how far was he honest?

The tide subsided slowly. Well, that was Stone's affair, not his. His opinion was not wanted. An overwhelming desire to be released—that was what those letters spelled. What should he do about that? What could he do about it until this new campaign for the children was started and he controlled his own actions? Time vanished in the contemplation of that. He did not even hear the clock strike four, or five. The first sound that roused him was the sound of old John shuffling the snow from his feet outside, and then opening the door that led into the study—old John coming to shake down the fires.

"It's up early ye are, Doctor," the old man said. "Or is ut late?" He held out to him the morning paper. "I suppose it's yourself had a hand in this news. Did ye make thim come to reason?"

"Not I, John," he answered. What did he mean by "the news," indeed?

He saw the head-lines an instant later.

STRIKE SETTLED!

EMPLOYERS DO PATRIOTIC THING

And then he sat quite still, his eyes fixed on the graying tenements outside, ten, twenty, thirty minutes. When he rose at last, it was to lay down the paper and draw himself up to the desk. Twenty minutes he spent at that—unsnapping two keys from his key-ring and wrapping them in the note he had written and putting the whole thing in an envelope. "For Nancy," he wrote on it.

By the time old John had finished with the fires, David was only a distant figure vanishing in the mist down Kerrigan Street.

IT WAS just an hour later that Nancy, in her funny little gold-and-black kimono, stole down the stairs, spied the letter by the ink-wells on the table, and an instant afterward fled back up to the apartment with the note in her hand. She opened it in bed.

DEAR NAN:

I've been reading your letters to Stone and see the thing quite clearly. These two keys are for the safe-deposit box at the Lincoln and the desk up-stairs. You'll find what bonds you need at the Lincoln, and that signed blank check on the Traders Bank is in the desk. Keep these things for yourself under all circumstances. I won't write to you. You can call it desertion. It means little. And, I think, satisfies the law of the state. Give all your affairs to Judge Addams. The old man is your friend. Forgive me for not seeing you. I could not. DAVE.

And that was all.

But it was enough for Nancy. She never forgot the loneliness and bitterness of that hour in the bedroom when she realized that she had brought her own fate upon herself and was but justly rewarded. She saw that clearly as she rose unsteadily and sat on the edge of the bed, little tense lines marking her white face with shadows. Yes; this was what faithlessness and disloyalty deserved. This was what a man of Forrester's kind would do, too. She might have known that, after all her years on Morpeth Terrace, after all her contact with that ruthless point of view that ruled men like her father and Forrester. He had been thinking only of how to get rid of David forever and secure her for himself.

In the silence of the bedroom suddenly she laughed—a laugh that ended in a queer, dry sob.

It was the necessity of finding him that roused her first and set her feverishly to dressing in the little bedroom. She could not believe that David could actually have disappeared. People did not do such things. He must be still in Clewesbury.

That was the hope that stirred in her heart as she refused to face separation and dressed hurriedly and went out for the car.

She knew she was too late, however, as she stood in the parlor on Fitzhugh Street a half-hour later and Aunt Susan told her he had caught an eight-fifty train for some place—Washington, she thought. If not for there, for Chicago.

"Oh!" she said then. And she knew that he had really gone.

But she would have died rather than have given away her secret just then. Aunt Susan was kinder than Aunt Hat. But there was no real welcome for her in this house. That was all they felt for her.

"Thanks," she said, with a curious look of steadiness in her gray eyes. "I only hoped I would catch him."

So David had kept it to himself, she told herself a little tremulously as she started the car in the icy street outside. She would have to have money if she were to find him. Back in Kerrigan Street, she opened his desk and went through it with odd swiftness. Yes; here was the check, just where he had put it that night the young doctor down on Allen Street had been stabbed by an Italian and had died in an hour. In case of accident, he had said, with his slow smile, as he locked up the little drawer. And this was the accident. But was there nothing else? Was this all the clue she was going to have?

She started to close the desk, but the words: "Lotos Club" on an envelope attracted her attention. She never knew just why she picked up that envelope, but she never forgot that she did so. An open envelope it was, and it rustled a little as she picked it up, and then something fell out on the desk. A white feather it was, she saw. And on the note-paper inside was written: "With our compliments, December twenty-fifth. The Lotos Club."

A full ten minutes, in the silent apartment, she stared at that white feather while she realized that he had never told her. And then a great lump came into her throat.

It was the beginning of her new view of David. And yet it was just a glimpse that she had of him playing his part on Kerrigan Street in silence, while she sought her own desires—and then the plain suggestion of the thing shut out the past with abrupt conviction. Why, that was where he had gone—to Washington! There had been no reason any longer why he should stay because of her—or because of these children on Kerrigan Street. The strike was over. How stupid she had been not to guess that immediately! He had sought out Breck at once, to get into the Medical Corps.

IT WAS just twenty-four hours later that she stood in the bleak, square reception-room of the Military Intelligence in Washington, staring out the window, waiting for Breck to answer the little slip the messenger had taken, in her mind the first ineffaceable impression of the swirling thousands of war-workers—clerks, stenographers, officers, sailors, business men, relief-workers—who crowded the streets and parks and buildings from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and swelled the city by the Potomac to bursting. Why, Clewesbury seemed vanished overnight here—Kerrigan Street and Congress Avenue a dream. How curious that there wasn't more stir in Clewesbury!

She forgot that thought almost immediately, however, at the sight of Breck's familiar figure coming down the hall, clad now in trim khaki.

"Have you seen David?" she asked tremulously.

"No!" he exclaimed. "Is he in Washington?"

"Yes," she said.

"Fine!" Breck cried. "The old dodo has waked up finally! What is he doing?"

She looked at him for a barely perceptible instant.

"I'll tell you at lunch," she said.

"Splendid!" he accepted.

It was a decidely perturbed Captain Addams, however, who stared at her in the crowded Occidental grill an hour later, once the story was over. Little Nancy Van Wyck in a mess of this kind! And with Forrester Stone, of all men! So it had happened just as he had thought it would. Fate had merely picked Forrester Stone—not himself. David might have gone anywhere, be anywhere, he told her, as he went over the possibilities one by one and gradually exhausted them. It would take weeks to locate a man in so many thousand places, with all the records in such incomplete state and with millions of men on the move.

"But he'll write somebody, of course," he finished.

"He won't write me," she told him.

"Well then," he decided, "his aunts. And, meantime, we'll depend on the surgeon-general's office. I'll send through a request, and keep them at it. I don't think Dave would do anything—foolish, do you?"

"No." She shook her head. Her eyes filled with tears.

"I hope not."

"I'm sure he won't," Breck assured her. "It's just a little mess that will be straightened out in a jiffy. If I were you, I'd go home—until we locate him.

"But I'm not going back," she said.

"You can stay for a while, of course," he agreed. "But you'll find it not much like Clewesbury. There isn't a soul in this town who hasn't got a war-job of some kind and isn't working top speed at it."

"Then I'll get a war-job, too," Nancy told him.

IT WAS not until night had come, however, and she refused Breck's invitation and had dinner by herself in a corner of the Willard dining-room, that she saw how difficult it was going to be to lose herself completely. She had not sent a line to Rhea Winters, she realized then. What was she going to do about her father? Even if he did not care a continental, it would look very strange if no one in Clewesbury knew what had become of her or David.

She cut that Gordian knot about midnight and wrote two splendid lies—one to New York and the other to Clewesbury. David had decided to enter the army, she informed her correspondents, and they were in Washington on the way South, where she would take some kind of position to be near him until he sailed for the other side.

It wasn't the truth—but it was necessary if she were ever going to hold to this course she had chosen.

Clearer comprehension of that course and all it involved came to her two days later as she had lunch with Breck again. No; the surgeon-general's office had no record of any David Carpenter, he told her—though, of course, it would take some time to get any real information. It might be a matter of months. Couldn't the Red Cross do anything for her?

She smiled a little at that.

"Why, I'm down there as a nurse's aid already," she told him, "without any husband in the army—merely working until they can send me across."

Breck's jaw dropped a little.

"You mean—" he began.

"Why, certainly," she admitted. "David's going across sometime. If I want to follow him, I better go first."

"That's Irish," Breck commented.

"But it's practical," she pointed out. "I think that old surgeon-general is asleep. He may never wake up in time for me."

"You can't tell anything about it," Breck admitted. "I think myself it's a matter of months."

A matter of months!

So she might have to spend months in this city where no one knew her and the name "Van Wyck" meant nothing.

Her heart failed her a little as she sat on the bed in the big front room she had taken on Rhode Island Avenue and contemplated the prospect. She wasn't made for difficulties like this, for loneliness and unhappiness— She stopped abruptly at that. She had never given anything but unhappiness to any one. She had just kicked away everything life had given her—instead of thinking of others, doing something for others the way David did, the way thousands of mothers and wives were doing and always had done. She had never tried real unselfishness. She was not even trying it now. Just using Breck and everything that came her way to attain her own ends, to assuage the pain in her heart, to bring back David to her, and without any thought of real unselfishness. That was what she was doing. And always had done!

To take life as it came, and say a kind word—and leave smartness to others, to love unselfishly and completely—and leave flirtation to others, to lose one's own desires in the thing achieved—and leave fame and ambition to others—that was David's way, and it was happiness. Would not the Christ of the kind eyes and the great heart help her to do that?

In the cold darkness sudden conviction came to her. Of course He would! Who could read flaming words of His spoken long ago and doubt it? Well, it was pretty late to start. But she would hurry and catch up with the others now.

That was the winter of unselfishness—

and no coal—in Washington, but I doubt if among all the thousands who thronged unaccustomed places there were any more devoted than Nancy. Just filing pictures that was all she did. But were ever pictures filed so devotedly before or since—or identified and labeled and sorted so carefully?

Perhaps to-morrow she would hear from David!

She never gave up that hope of hearing from him. No; there might be a letter from him any evening when she came up the steps of the Rhode Island Avenue house and looked over the mail upon the high hallstand—or if not then, there might be one in the morning when she came down. Surely Aunt Susan must hear soon and forward the letter. What was he doing that he did not write to his aunts?

But she bore up quite bravely, indeed, until spring came. Was she herself making a mistake to shut her life up like a cocoon waiting to brust forth only for David? When she had not heard from him in months and might never hear again. When she might have simply given up Forrester—and enjoyed herself the rest of the time.

She gazed doubtfully upon the idea for two brief evenings while she went to the Washington Roof with new acquaintances. And then she shook off the temptation forever. No, she decided; it was like those moments she sometimes still had at night when the memory of Forrester's passionate embrace assailed her like a nostalgia—those moments when she grew hot with shame at the sudden realization that she could still wish for the ecstasy of the imps of passion after all that had happened, after all her resolutions. It was but another device of the imps to win her away from her decision. She would not do it.

AS THE breathless Southern summer came on, her hope of hearing from David faded week by week. It was curious how that fading hope only seemed to make her more determined than ever to be all that he would want her.

It was mid-August before Breck called her up in the stifling room where she worked and told her he had news of David. Her heart almost stopped at that.

"Is he all right?" she asked at once.

"Oh, yes," Breck assured her.

David had sailed two weeks before, he told her at lunch, while she tried to eat and failed. The records had come through, and David's name was on them. A captain in the Medical Corps, it said.

She took her way back to the marble building then, a queer ache in her throat and a tiny feeling of thankfulness in her heart. Well, he was all right, so far, anyway. Perhaps he would get across safely. She did not try to stretch her courage beyond that. No; the Medical Corps wasn't dangerous, she tried to tell herself. David would come through safely. Until she herself got across, anyhow, and found him. When would her own chance come?

It was just two weeks later that it did come. Report on Fourth Avenue, in New York, in one week, it said.

Two days later she found her father sitting alone in the library, reading, with that grim look round his mouth that decided her finally. Yes; she could be nice to him for once in her life—and go home for the week and see him.

"Well," he said, "I thought you were dead."

"No," she answered. "Just selfish."

He stared at her a long time at that. And then he put down the papers slowly and turned to the humidor.

"Um," he said, as he took out a cigar.

But she took a swift step toward him, her eyes a trifle misty, and put her hand over his.

"Kiss me first," she said.

For a moment he looked at her. And then he kissed her.

"I came home to see you because I'm going to France next week," she said.

His eyes showed his astonishment. But he did not betray it otherwise.

Then she told him her story—a little doubtfully at first, and then unrestrainedly, as the loneliness of the months came to her tongue and all the bungle she had made of her life rose up before her. Just once did Andrew Van Wyck interrupt, and that was when Forrester Stone was mentioned. And then granite silence came to him. A long time he stared at her, too, in the silent library after she had finished.

"You don't remember your mother, do you, Nan?" he asked her then, with odd hesitation.

"No," she answered.

"She did what you—didn't do," he said.

e hesitated an instant, and then fell silent ce more. It was noticeable that he did t condemn her. "What you been doing r money?" he inquired.

"David gave me his when he left," she id, little drops of water gathering in her es.

"Humph," said Mr. Van Wyck. "By d!" he added.

It was not until they came together from theatre that night that Nancy really ew what her father thought. He stood the doorway of her old room then, pulling his cigar, looking round.

'It's just as you left it," he said gruffly. ou know"—he stared at his cigar as if re were something radically wrong with -"you know, I was never sure I treated just right. I never could tell about you. ver knew what you thought. But I ss I was wrong. You've turned out all t. The way—your mother might have 'd been like your—man."

WAS a very queer Nancy who sailed from New York three weeks later on sty gray-and-green-camouflaged French mer bound for Bordeaux. Like a ghost ome kind, the sense of the past had ged her every footstep in Clewesbury, ng by her elbow as she drove down- n with her father, ascending the stairs her to her old bedroom at night, calling er to look out over the garden in the nlight—to look at the pergola and the ars and the hollyhocks standing like ts at the foot of the garden. That was re she and David had sat that first t when they had come home from the . That was where they had sat many s through all the evenings of the pas- te summer. How unchanged was this en, under the moon, beside the palace adows! Only she was changed.

at curious sense of the past had been her through all the evenings she had with her father in the library and at theatres. He went every night now. ad been with her, too, a thousand- stronger after that visit she made to itzhugh Street house when she read d's queer, jerky letters from the ern camp to the two fading old ladies. hed to the field-hospital of his bri- —that was the only real fact of im- nce in them all. Apparently he had not known when he was sailing until the moment had come. And there had not been a word about her through them all! Except to repeat the promise he had made them give that they would never tell Nancy.

She had broken down a little then—and told Aunt Susan what had happened while the soft-voiced old lady sat in mouselike silence, nodding her head occasionally, and announced in her quiet way that David ought to be told—and she would tell him.

She wrote him a short, odd little note. He might not want her now, of course. She might be presuming. She could not tell him everything in a letter. But she was sending him the line-a-day book she had kept in Washington. And that would tell him a great deal. And she was coming to France to see him—if he wanted to see her. And there really had been a reason—and she would never love any one but him. And wouldn't he write to her to the Place de la Concorde, where the Red Cross was?

Forrester had not been in Clewesbury in months, she learned. He wasn't needed for United Clothing just now, her father told her. The common stock was rising to unprecedentedly high levels, and the dividends would be large.

The Brotherhood House was still going. That information had given her a queer assortment of feelings. She stole down to Kerrigan Street one afternoon, to see how old John was keeping the cat, and was not able to resist the impulse to climb the stairs to the apartment and see if Dr. Dunstan was in. He had been out, luckily, and she had stood in the doorway staring at the familiar rooms until she could bear it no longer and had gone down-stairs again to Annie and the study.

Through all this it became plainer, if possible, that she had been her own worst enemy, that she had been so utterly selfish, that even at the end she had merely run away from it all without facing Forrester, without putting anything to the test. She had deserved everything she was getting. Just lack of will and character to control the strength of her emotions—that was what it had been from the beginning.

She could have no intimate men friends if she wanted David. That was the truth for her, and she had chosen to ignore it, to build a wall about the subject of sex, to make a barrier between them, when they should have been loving comrades, each protecting the other, building a little haven of loyalty and security in a world of tumultuous currents. She had not understood that emotion flowed like a tide through all humanity—a tiny trickle in some, a mighty, surging stream in others; barely moving in the clod, making mad the beast, sweeping along like a torrent in the great figures of mankind, urging them to fine heights or corresponding depths; present in the saint and the courtesan, the genius and the drunkard, the conqueror and the artist; gracing dull clay with the shining flower of personality and magnetism or the muddy weeds of sensuality and lasciviousness according to the character God gave and man used. She had not understood that because she had thought herself different from other people. And so had done as she felt.

The thing came home to her with unforgetable force as she stood by the aft rail and watched Sandy Hook fade behind. Would David ever be able to understand that, she wondered. To see that she was not a worm?

IT WAS mid-October by the time she reached the stone hospital in Neuilly on the Seine, just outside of Paris—the October that saw America struggling heroically through the tangled, high-crested Argonne woods toward Sedan, while the lines of battle swept steadily north and east along the French and British fronts. She had gone to the hospital to wash floors and take temperatures and give baths and change sheets, with a great sense of relief at being worth while, of doing something at last.

Complete realization of her own littleness and selfishness came to her just a month later as she got down from her ambulance while the driver put on a new tire and went a little way into the tangled, misty woods about the smashed town of Vaux and saw in the raw the soggy sand-bags and the little damp graves with the American colors on the crosses.

So this was what Belleau Wood had meant for those who had never gotten as far as the hospital! They had died here in the woods, while the Germans had come across the hills and fields to drive them out. The thing hardly seemed possible—American crosses three thousand miles from Clewesbury and Congress Avenue and the lights of the square. And yet there were the crosses glistening in the rain, and the armistice had just been signed and she was on her way to Germany to join the First Army if this ambulance convoy ever got there.

And then Verdun! She sat up, almost frightened at the weirdness of their entry through the high ancient gate. Before her slept a ghostly, shattered city. Street after street of high stone houses, their hanging blinds and torn floors speaking of the agony of shell-fire. Side street after side street where rose great barricades of rubbish, blocking all progress. The city lay beneath the December rain-clouds—silent, abandoned, murdered——

Why, there could never be any victory in this for any one, she saw suddenly. This was not victory. This was tragedy—the unforgetable picture of what brutal selfishness could do on a grand scale.

It was the goal which uncontrolled, brutal self-seeking would always lead, indeed, whether in Clewesbury or Berlin, in Kerrigan Street or Verdun. It was what David was trying to fight, and had always felt as his enemy. It was Evil!

It was her first clear glimpse of the whole of David's philosophy.

I doubt if any one would have guessed her thoughts that night as she got down from the ambulance in the dark of the Luxembourg streets and went stiffly up the steps of the Hotel Brasseur into the pleasant glow of the lobby. Just a tired, bedraggled American girl in a dark-blue uniform—a girl who had gone forty-eight hours without sleep and had dark circles beneath her steady gray eyes.

Could there have been a worse moment for that inevitable meeting with Forrester Stone? Not possibly, I vow, by all the rules of conquest!

And yet—he was standing directly by the entrance to the dining-room, and he recognized her immediately. Just a second it took him to cross the lobby, despite his stunned surprise, and touch her on the sleeve.

"Nancy!" he exclaimed.

She did not know him in his major's uniform—for an instant. And then she held out her hand.

"Why, hello, Forrester!" she said, oddly tremulous.

"Nan! I—I can hardly believe it," he

The thing

Everybod

The thing came home to her with unforgetable force as she stood by the aft rail and watched Sandy Hook fade behind. Would David ever be able to understand that, she wondered.

stammered. "Are you—have you—" It was the only time in the Man of Destiny's existence, perhaps, that he was ever at a loss. "Have you had dinner?" he managed to get out finally.

"Why, no," she told him, with hastily summoned self-assurance, "though I propose to eat all Luxembourg out of house and home."

"I've just ordered," he said. Her matter-of-fact humor seemed to brace him up like a cool breeze. "But won't you have your dinner with me?"

"I don't see why not," she replied. There was no reason, indeed, why she should not treat him as an ordinary friend.

"Then we will," he finished.

A curious trembling in him, indeed, that he could not command at this new sight of her after all the months. He could not keep his eyes from her changed appearance. What had been happening to her? Why was she over here in this Red Cross uniform? What had happened to David? And—well, had he succeeded or had he failed? A matter of endless self-questioning and wondering and doubt the thing had been to him ever since he had called the Brotherhood House that next noon and had gotten no answer and had gone down there ostensibly to see Dunstan at night and had heard the stunning news that both the Carpenters had gone for good. He had not even known whether they had gone together or not. And old Van Wyck had maintained that stony silence of his—and he himself had never known.

In the pleasant Hotel Brasseur dining-room he told her all that in a curiously apologetic tone while he kept his eyes on the table.

"Why, I went to find David," she told him simply at once.

"And did not give a thought to me?" he asked.

"No," she said slowly. She put out her hand swiftly the instant she had said it, too, because his hurt was so evident. "Because I couldn't, Forr," she said. "I—I am sorry. I knew it the minute I got his note. I knew it before that—down in the study—when I couldn't leave him."

"But he had gone then!" cried Forrester Stone. "I mean, when you got his note."

"That only made me all the surer," she said. Her eyes sought the table, too, and she hesitated. "Something happened to me," she said. "I don't know what. I saw—things—somehow. I was mean to you, of course. But it wasn't because I wanted to be. It was because I was afraid to be anything else."

"And you haven't heard from David?"

"No," she told him.

He did not press the question. Because it did not make any difference, he realized abruptly. Because he had lost. Because she would rather just the chance of David than the surety of himself. What a staggering thought that was—showing once more the inexplicability of women! To prefer life with that no-good doctor to climbing the heights with him! Why, the immense field for his business which this war and the wave of good will for America in all lands was about to open made his future boundless. Public opinion was going to be the battle-ground of the world more than ever from now on. Democracy and newspapers and publicity. His own chosen career. He could add the rest of the world to his dream of influencing public opinion in America. Whoever controlled the press and the news of the world would be its Bismarck in this era just opening. Why should that not be he?

"Better think it over carefully, Nan," he told her quietly. "And consider what I can offer you."

"I'm not in the market."

"Well, we'll talk it over in the morning, then," he finished. "You must be nearly dead."

"I am," she admitted. "It's my first bed in three nights."

"Let's say good-night, then," he told her. "And I'll see you in the morning."

"Yes," she said pleasantly.

HE TRIED to bring up the subject again in the morning. But she drove with him in his G. H. Q. automobile all the way from the Hotel Brasseur to Coblenz, while the nurse who was with her rode in the front seat and the ambulance followed, and she refused to discuss it. There was little use, she had decided, why she should tell him how she had come to feel about him and his point of view. Why was it not better to let it go as it was, and enjoy the beautiful Moselle valley and the endless variety of pictures the army made on the march?

They came at last to the silent, black-lowing Rhine taking its ancient way past oblenz and the brightly lighted hotel, out-ost of the untouched, brilliant German ity, and she knew the moment had come r her to say good-by to Forrester.

"It's been a very pleasant meeting," she id to him outside the gray structure which as to be her home as long as her unit ayed with the army.

"Yes," he said in a low voice.

"Good-by," she said.

Final desperation came to him.

"It doesn't have to be good-by," he said. will be here several days more—I can see u. There's no reason against that."

"Yes, there is," she said steadfastly.

"I don't see why."

"Because I can't see you," she said gently.

"It's silly!"

'Not now, Forr," she said. "I can't ve friends like you—and—and face vid. I—I like you too well. That is the th. What it might have been had David er been, I don't know. I hate some-es to think. I might have loved you—assion is love. But not now."

'It's madness!" he said. "Just for an , Nan——"

'That's all life is," she interrupted. e been endlessly unfair to you—and vid and every one. I hope you can blot out of your life forever the minute you e turned the corner of the hotel. I'm y for all that." She twisted her hands tle in the darkness. "Kiss me good-by."

e took her in his arms at once.

Not good-by!" he said fiercely. "Not !"

e did not struggle.

es," she said. "Don't make it harder e. You love me enough to say good-by."

instant he hesitated. And then his fell limp.

ll right," he said slowly. "Good-by."

ood-by," she repeated.

d she kissed him suddenly and ran up tone steps into her hotel.

E end of adventure, and the end of everything—yes; that was what this ell was. Mere fortune that she had run Forrester in this great maelstrom of s that swept Europe! She might seek for years and never find him, even stayed in France, even if he was already slated for home, even if nothing had happened to him.

Afterward, she could never help reflecting whimsically how closely that very hour must have coincided with the moment that David opened a certain package in his room in the Ritz Carlton, at Cannes, on the shores of the Mediterranean in southern France. Facing the sea, his room was, and the promenade, where girls in white serge carried golf-clubs and tennis-rackets, where American officers strolled, completing the romance of ten days' leave in Nice and on the Riviera. Across the circle of the bay, the blue and purple mountains encircled the sunlit Mediterranean waters. Up and down the esplanade of palms the khaki-clad doughboy strolled. By the Casino, the band played "A Baby's Prayer at Twilight" while the convalescents sang and beat time to the music. And just outside the windows sounded the soft swish and gentle breaking of the waves.

But David was not noticing or hearing anything. He was holding in his hand a short note written in an unmistakable hand, and staring a little blindly at a small line-a-day book which lay in its wrappings on the table before him.

Before God, what infinite power to wound a man love gave one's beloved—power beside which that of an Alexander or a Ghengis Khan shrank into insignificance! Over a year now since that moment in the study in distant Clewesbury, and yet every detail of that night, every line of those passionate letters stood out here with cameralike distinctness, brought back like a flash by the mere sight of the capricious writing on an envelope. He would never forget that, of course. Love had died for him forever in that hour, leaving in its place only sharp anguish.

What was Nancy doing to-night?

That question had been with him night after night, through all the weeks in camp, on the troop-ship to Liverpool, and in all the horrible nights when he had stood hour after hour, night after night, till dawn came, beside the operating-table in the château. It had come to him at odd moments ever since he had walked down Kerrigan Street in the morning mist and left Clewesbury forever. Only in these last two weeks had he thought he was beginning to get a grip on the everlasting anguish of the thing.

And just this sight of her handwriting brought it all back, multiplied a thousand times—as if it had all happened but the night before!

What could she have to say to him now?

In the silence of the room he read the note carefully, little lines of skepticism showing round his tired eyes at first, but disappearing swiftly as the meaning of the thing came home to him and he leaned forward suddenly, hungrily, for the line-a-day book. Why, did she mean that she had never loved Stone after all? That she had been but that impulsive child he had always thought her? That—that her letters had been— Like a shadow, the thought of those letters came. What did she mean?

It was just an hour later that he knew.

Why, he had been no help to her from the beginning—any more than if he had been an Andrew Van Wyck! He had merely married her and left her to fight out her own battle, to work out her own salvation—instead of facing the truth with her from the start and helping her fight the battle of passion, no matter what momentary bitterness it might have cost him.

That was what they should have been from the beginning—loving comrades. Only her own endless courage and heart-breaking battle had pulled out a victory for them in the end. For that was what this line-a-day book spelled: Victory!

What was it she had said her address was?

Oh, yes—the Red Cross in Paris—Place de la Concorde. Well, he would write her at once. Funny, pathetic, everlastingly warm-hearted Nan!

He did write to her, too—that very night. But Nancy never got it. It was not because the postal service was to blame, but because she had gotten ten days' leave by that time, and had gone to Cannes for ten days' blessed sleep and rest.

She got off in the station and arranged to have her baggage go up in the taxi while she walked the few streets to ease her weariness, rather glad that she did not know any one in the town. She could just sit in the sunshine, and perhaps afterward play tennis. And surely, some day, David would get her letter and answer something.

That was all she was thinking of as she rounded the corner by the hotel and saw the immemorial purple twilight and in the distance a galleon of dreams, drifting idly, a gray-ghost fishing-boat, with all sails set—drifting idly out past the shadowy shore of the bay to the Mediterranean.

And the next moment she saw David!

She knew him instantly, despite the uniform and the fact that his back was turned to her. And then a wave of tenderness almost engulfed her, turning her faint of a sudden, forcing her to stop. Not for her hopes of heaven could she have taken those few steps between him and the palm tree to which she clung so faintly.

"Why, Dave!" she cried, with all the clearness she could muster. And he turned and saw her.

NOT until darkness had come and in the hotel the waiters began wondering when the chef would refuse to longer serve did it occur to either of them that dinner might be desirable—or anything might be required of a new guest beyond a secure place in another guest's arms. And even then Nancy did not want to go.

That was because David was not yet thoroughly convinced that it was right for him to ask her to live through the life that his ideas would call for—when it meant sacrifice for her.

"Only, it doesn't, you see," she pointed out to him at last. "Because there isn't any sacrifice—when your wife wants to do it, too. It's just the big highroad to happiness."

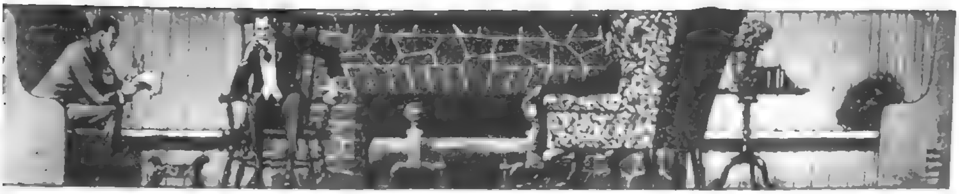
She knew that now, she thought, as she crossed the esplanade toward the hotel. Riches, power, passion—none of these made people happy. They had not made her happy, any more than they had her father or Forrester or any of the others. They were the sowing of the wind—vanity, and as blowing wind, as Ecclesiastes said. Wages did not bring happiness any more than passion's conquest, or the world-dominion and *Drang nach Osten* of the kaiser's fallen empire, or the conquest of the world's markets by Wall Street.

Only unselfishness and kindliness, and here and there a simple word and deed.

Tears came into her eyes at the thought.

What were they but a new and longer name for David?

THE END



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

WHEN "Chimney Corner's" request for personality material reached Holworthy Hall (Harold E. Porter), whose novel, "Rope," pears in this issue, he was in Paris.

s to the personal story [he replied], I am at a loss.
re are two or three little items, however, which
ıt be worked up into something readable. The
one is that a year ago, 1921, I was made a
tor of Letters by Wake Forest College, in Wake
st, North Carolina. It is all Southern, is a
hodist institution, and gives very few honorary
ees. I happen to have a winter home in Pine-
t, North Carolina, but I am neither a Southerner
a Methodist. The compliment, then, was all
more profound. It was given me because,
ding to the wording of the president's intro-
on, the college wanted to show its appreciation
man who, in spite of the necessity of earning a
by magazine fiction, was conscientiously try-
so to be a stylist.

ittle later, at a reception, the president phrased
erently:

his man writes the best English (about things
orth writing about) of any man of his age. I
rmly convinced that if he hadn't abandoned
lf to fiction, he might have made an honest
."

second item is that, when I was seventeen
ears old, Charles Frohman offered me twenty-
ollars a week to go on the stage. I didn't go, and
has ever duplicated the offer, but if exchange
ues to run against us, I may have to advertise.
hird thing is that almost until the day I was
ated from Harvard, I was pointed toward a
sional career. I took my degree in classics,
lly Latin, and it was fairly certain that I
go to the classical school in Rome and be-
an instructor in Latin. I had seven offers,
ng an assistant professorship at Oberlin and
ructorship at Exeter, and my ambition at that
as to land eventually in the Classical Depart-
t Harvard.

then I became engaged, and a professor's
looked none too large, and so I became a
er instead.

MY FOREBEARS for eleven generations have all been either amateur or professional soldiers, with rank all the way from private to major-general, and I inherited a taste for powder. Before I went to college at all, it was touch-and-go whether I should aim for Cambridge or for the Point. I might have had one of the presidential appointments-at-large. But Cambridge won out.

That is, here you have the stage, West Point, Latin, the publishing business, and finally fiction. Can you string together something about the conflicting emotions which eventually drive a man into his own proper stall? Of course it leaves my guard wide open—everybody who doesn't like my stuff can promptly say that it's a pity I didn't fall for Frohman or go into the army—but that's that. Can you make anything out of it?

WE WERE particularly anxious for the "Chimney Corner" circle to know something about Henry Francis Granger ("'Gee! Let's Go!'" page 23), for we believe he has written a really unusual series of kid-stories for grown-ups. But he won't talk about himself. Here's what he says about his stories:

For a long time I've wanted to write some kid-stories. We get our mental stimulus from many sources, but we are apt to forget the need of soul-vitamins—the thing that restores the view-point dulled by the years. It's the child in us that sets us reading stories. If we were ever unfortunate enough to become entirely grown-up, we would have no use for fiction. Those most nearly approaching this point call it "development," when, as a matter of fact, it's decay. Something within us has atrophied that is of vastly more import than arteries or blood-pressure, and the loss which makes a mock of wisdom.

Only children live in the delectable romance-land, and the grown-up adventurer is but an older kid. Most of the real happiness of later years comes from the child that is left in our hearts, and, if I remember right, the Bible says only the child-man gets to heaven. In writing these stories, I touched things forgotten, things I never expected to feel again. Now, I believe, however long I may stick round, I shall never again be as old as I have been. The writing was worth while, and I only hope EVERYBODY'S readers may touch in the reading, as I did in writing, the Something that wipes away the years.

FROM the *Century Magazine* we take the following about Donn Byrne ("Triangle," page 85):

Mr. Byrne's full name is Brian Oswald Donn-Byrne, but he prefers the use of "Donn Byrne" without the hyphen, and signs all of his writings in that way. Mr. Byrne was born in New York of a North of Ireland family. His father, a well-known Irish architect, had come to this country for a brief stay to superintend a building of which he was the designer. So it happened that, at the age of three, Brian Oswald Donn-Byrne was taken back to Ireland to grow up on the family estate, where Gaelic was more spoken than English, and where he might absorb all the fanciful romantic lore of Ireland. He received his degree from University College, Dublin—where he was a college boxing champion, by the way—and later studied at the Sorbonne in Paris and at Leipsic University. In 1911 he came to America, and, after an apprenticeship at editorial work, made a notable success as a writer of short stories.

TO BELDON DUFF ("The Soul-Scar") this question was put: "What are the qualifications necessary for a successful writer of mystery stories?" His reply:

First, I suppose one must be born with a story-teller's tongue. Care to know whether you're one of the elect? If you think you are, try to tell friend wife the story of that five-reel thriller you saw at the motion-picture palace last night and see whether you can make her drop the newspaper before she discovered that the suit she bought for fifty-nine dollars and fifty cents has just been reduced to forty-three dollars and seventy-five cents. Remember, however, that it's one thing to talk a story out of your system and another to write it down in unsympathetic black and white—black and white that's readable and—I take it that this is important—salable.

Personally, I've never been troubled for lack of material. If anything, it gets ahead of me—accumulates too fast in the back of my brain. When I sat down to write my first story, my ideas were in a disorderly heap, for all the world like one of those jig-saw picture-puzzles that used to be so popular as an indoor sport some ten or twelve years ago. I carried my puzzle to the breakfast-table; I took it to the ball-game; I found it in the can of worms when I went fishing; I began to lose interest in family and friends and food.

At last I made a discovery; Mr. Briggs is right—a time comes "when a feller needs a friend." Then and there I packed up my literary tin dishes and carried them to Ann Watkins. From her I learned that a mystery story has a technic of its own—a different technic from any other form of fiction. And, furthermore, that it is perhaps the most difficult of all.

BELDON DUFF'S experience shows that plots are suggested in curious ways.

Now, as to the birth of the plot, the selection of the first piece—you see the puzzle-idea still persists—it's not always easy to say what influences it. In my case, it's usually a chance remark, something that throws new light on the w.-k. workings of the good old gray matter. To be specific: "Twenty-four Hours" grew out of a dinner-table discussion of the "walk-in," that flapperish young person who walks in to parties without the formality of an invitation. Try as I would, I couldn't quite get a mental attitude of a girl who horned in where she wasn't wanted. I felt, somehow, that she'd have to have some darned good excuse for being so—well, to put it mildly, so ultramodern. And by degrees the girl I had in mind—my heroine—found an excuse, and that excuse involved a lot of other people—as excuses always do—a princess and a couple of villains and a hero. On the other hand, "The Soul-Scar" was suggested by a house. The One Pine Inn I have tried to describe for you. I saw it perched on the side of a hill, and to me it seemed like a stage all set and waiting for the actors. Finding people to act is an easy matter; the air is full of them. Ask Sir Arthur Conan Doyle if it isn't. They only need a touch to bring them to life.

And that, to sum up in a few words, is, I presume, the real secret of all writing—the touch that brings things to life.

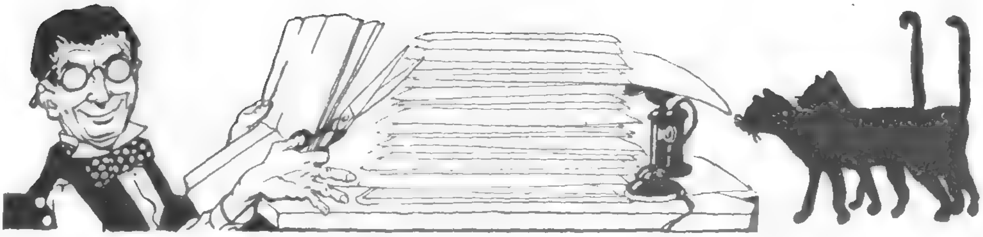
HELEN REDINGTON ("The New House," page 16), with a couple of university degrees, thought destiny meant her to be a school teacher. So to the Northwest she went.

There [she goes on] I met mountains and forests and the ocean. I earned my living from Monday to Friday. And I spent it from Friday to Monday in a mountaineer's lodge which we kept conveniently at hand. Then Mammon whispered that real salaries grow in California. I went to see; I made the acquaintance of a bank-account. After two years I could afford to philosophize. Already my end was in sight. I should, even as others, come to counting the years to a pension. Then myself and I had some conversation.

"Do you," said I, "consider school-teaching the chief end of man?" "No"—from myself. "Isn't there anything you *want* to do?" "I want to write." Myself was becoming indignant. "You know it perfectly well. And you know what a lot of rot that was that you carried down and put in the furnace yesterday." "So you're going to slink through life without even trying out the thing you want?" "I am NOT!"

So we drew forth our savings and took train to New York. Our savings vanished, but we found menial labor wherewith to feed ourselves, and continued blithely on our way. Moral: It is much, much nicer to like Monday to Friday than just Friday to Monday.

SEWELL HAGGARD.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Albany *Times-Union*: "*To Let— ——Street; flat, newly re-ventilated.*" (MRS. E. S. D.)

In Flint, Mich., Public Library, listed under "Medicine and Biology:" "*Worm-Gearing.*"

Collar advertisement: "*The Argonne.*" **(When are they going to name one "Belleau Wood?")**

Overheard on Michigan Boulevard, Chicago: "*Remember yours are wool and mine aren't.*"

(*Wisdom, Mont., Big Hole Basin News*)

Gordon Knowles wishes that some one would give another of those kissing parties. He says that his lips are getting very dry. (E. T. A.)

Well, so far as dry lips are concerned, he's got nothing on me.

(*Wisdom, Mont., Big Hole Basin News*)

Miss Braun, Miss Wooligan, Thos. Wanan and Joe Coursey spent the week-end in the plunge at Jackson, but we do not notice any difference in the way they smell. (E. T. A.)

And they let that editor *live?*

(*Hartford Courant*)

Elsie Janis and her "gang" gave a show at Parsons's Theater last evening that pleased a lot of people while it did not reach those whose ideas of a musical show are bounded on the north, south, east and west by oceans of girls and atolls of costumes.

Atolls? Why, that being a coral reef, can he mean *beads?*

(*Walsenburg, Colo., World*)

Mr. and Mrs. John Unger have moved into their new home on Capital Hell. (MRS. S. J. L.)

Married long?

(*On a shop window in Washington*)

I Never Disappoint. BYRON S. ADAMS. (G. H. O.)

Being a cozzen o' mine, *I'll* say he don't.

(*Toronto Telegram*)

Party that took by mistake coat from Royal Saturday evening, please return it to 24 Corley Ave., and get theirs. (B. G. S.)

No, thank you; my face has got all it will stand *now.*

(*New York Evening Sun*)

The Studebaker Corporation on Monday is opening a fine appointed salesroom in Harlem at 2065 Seventh Avenue in charge of the Smith brothers.

Wonder how much I'd have to cough up to get in?

(*Johnston, Neb., Enterprise*)

Owing to the same having been held Tuesday night instead, there will be no Methodist choir-practise Friday night, as previously announced. (C. C. J.)

Huh! They're just jealous of *somebody's* voice.

(*Head-line in Literary Digest*)

THE OLD COLLIE DOG THAT SOLD FARMS (P. S. R.)

A pointer for lazy real-estate agents.

(*New York Journal*)

IRISH SENTINEL SHOOTS DEAD CIVILIAN WHO FAILED TO HALT (R. E. Y.)

You just can't down those D. C's.

Copyright, 1922, by Gridley Adams.

(Wheeling, W. Va., Register)

James Rawlides, a cook in a local restaurant, was fined $50 and costs in police court yesterday on a charge of "Alleluia," "Abide With Me," conclud-
(W. G. S.)

If he'd passed some round, they probably'd have let him off free.

(Philadelphia Inquirer)

Divorces and collections a specialty. Absolute secrecy. Unique plan of payments. M. Graft, Spruce 5623. (G. F. C.)

What! Graft unique in Philly?

(Denver Post)

Disabled veteran would like to have room and board in private family, or prefer widow's home. Box 3 M245-Post. (H. A. G.)

Rock me to sleep, widow; rock me to sleep.

(Sign displayed in Selma, Ala., hotel)

On request from the clerk, fresh towels will be furnished to each guest. (W. R.)

Oh, won't that be nice?

(Signature at end of lumber concern's letter)

Yours very truly,
HAPS & SPIRE
per HAPS.

Or, if it was a warm day, maybe the *other* one might sign it.

(Adv. in Saturday Evening Post)

What do you look for when you buy a rain-coat?

Rain! Do you think I'd get one to wear while I'm eavesdropping? (But that *was* the cause of Adam's fall.)

(Head-lines in Findlay, O., Republican)

PAIR EXPECTS TO SEE CENTURY MARK
STATE OFFICIALS MAY SEEK TO HAVE THEM MADE INTO RECREATION-SPOTS
(MRS. L. M. D.)

Tag! You're it.

(Adv. in Glasgow, Scotland, Herald)

Excellent talking parrot and cage for sale; refined speaker. 4236 *Herald* Office. (A. M. S.)

Could refinement go higher?

(Philadelphia Bulletin)

WANTED—Women all around. X-364.
(G. F. C.)

Sure! The more the merrier.

(Prairie du Chien, Wis., Courier)

Harry Pomeroy, of Gay Mills, is taking the baths here for a few days. He recently attended the hardware dealers' convention in Milwaukee.
(F. J.)

It'll take another week, at least, to get back to himself again.

(Philadelphia Bulletin)

Young Women—8 wanted to pack and roll in bakery. Apply 3857 High Street. (G. F. C.)

If you find a thread in your biscuit, you'll know it's a ragamuffin.

(New York Evening Journal)

Rewards of $5,000, each, totaling $15,000, were offered to-day by the Post Office Department for the capture, dead or alive, of the three daring daylight bandits who late last night held up at revolver's point a mail-truck at Broadway and Leonard streets. (L. J. C.)

And the sun was shining brightly, for it rained quite hard that night.

(Baltimore American)

WANTED—By married couple with seven-months-old, child, apartment consisting of two rooms, kitchen and bath. Address, 1776, *News.*

Probably never get a chance to sleep, anyway.

(Daytona, Fla., News)

Waterbury, Conn.—A mad dog, with a Woonsocket, R. I. tag on its collar, bit a number of people. After being shot by a policeman, the dog bit a trolley-car wire and was killed. (J. B. W.)

That must have been the purp that chased Gulliver.

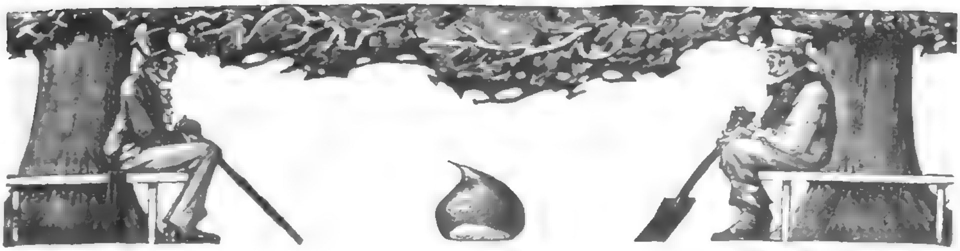
(Circular received from Palace Hotel, Naples)

Cavaliere F. Bertolini requests the honor of your patronage at his hotel assuring you, both from himself & staff, the comfort of "a model home".

Arrange to make a stay as long as possible and say with Goethe, "He who can remember Naples can never more be quite unhappy." Apartments elegantly but hygienically plain, decorated with all modern improvements. Hotel auto-bus, as well as English-speaking porter, meets all trains and steamers. The Terrace every afternoon is the rendezvous of the most aristocratic international crowd. Any one passing through Naples should not miss to see it. Restaurant fashionable (also open to non-residents); its luncheons are a specialty, afternoon-tea concerts world renowned and its dinners for epicureans. Wines of best crops and vintage.

Here you meet royalties and the aristocracy of caste and finance.

Sure! See that chap over there? He's the castiest junk dealer in New York.



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

Editor's Note: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

THE following story is related of a Southern circuit-riding preacher. It seems that he was extremely fond of the well-known relish, pepper sauce. Because he did not always find it present on the table at his various stopping-places, he made a practise of carrying a pint flask of it with him wherever he went. One day, while dining in a small tavern, he took out his flask and placed it upon the table. An Irishman at the table asked the preacher if he might have a bit from his flask, and the latter told him he was very welcome to it. The Irishman thereupon poured out about a half a glassful and added about the same quantity of water. Then he swallowed the mixture at one swallow. When, at the end of some thirty minutes, he had somewhat recovered, he asked,

"Sor, are you one of thim preachers who tills us about hell-foire and brimstone?"

"I occasionally mention such things in my discourses," responded the minister.

"Well, begorra, an' Oi've seen miny af your koind before, but you are the foist Oi iver met that carried his samples with him."

DR. BLAKE, the town's sole physician, was, in his additional capacity of Sunday-school superintendent, questioning a class on the day's lesson.

"What must we do to get to heaven?" he asked.

"We gotta die," replied a bright scholar.

"Of course," said the doctor. "But what must we do before that?"

"We must get sick and send for you," was the reply.

DURING a recent political campaign, two deacons of the same faith religiously but on opposite sides of the fence politically, attended prayer-meeting services.

"O Lord," intoned the Republican deacon, "I pray thee that the Republicans may hang together——"

"Amen!" ejaculated the Democrat.

"But not, O Lord," continued the Republican, "in the sense that my Democratic brother means, but in the sense of accord and concord."

"Any cord'll do, Lord; any cord'll do!" was the Democrat's closing thrust.

DAVID WALSH, United States senator from Massachusetts, recently told the following story on himself:

A man by the name of Davis, while passing along the main street in Clinton, the senator's former home, stepped into a hole in the sidewalk and, falling, broke his leg. He brought suit against the city for one thousand dollars and engaged Walsh as counsel.

Walsh won the case, but the city appealed to the Supreme Court. Here, also, the decision was for Walsh's client. After settling up the claim, Walsh sent for his client and handed him one dollar.

"What's this?" asked the man.

"That's your damages, after taking out my fee, the cost of appeal and several other expenses," said Walsh.

The man looked at the dollar and then at Walsh.

"What's the matter with this?" he asked. "Is it bad?"

ONCE a friend of Mark Twain's was conversing with him regarding a terrible affliction of a person known to them both. The friend said,

"Can you imagine anything worse than having diphtheria and scarlet fever at the same time?"

"Yes," replied Mark; "I can easily imagine some things worse than that—for instance, rheumatism and St. Vitus's dance."

DR. J. M. BUCKLEY, the Methodist divine, was asked one day to conduct an experience-meeting at a negro church in the South.

A woman rose and bore witness to the preciousness of her religion as light-burner and comfort-giver.

"That's good!" commented Dr. Buckley. "But how about the practical side? Does your religion make you strive to prepare your husband a good dinner? Does it make you look after him in every way?"

Just then he felt a yank at his coat tails. It was the minister, who whispered ardently:

"Press dem questions, Doctor; press dem questions. Dat's my wife."

"DO YOU know anything about flirting?" asked Cuthbert.

"No," replied Gilbert sadly. "I thought I did, but the girl I tried it on married me."

ONE of the churches in a little Western town has a young woman for its pastor. She was called to the door of the parsonage one day and saw there a much embarrassed young farmer of the German type.

"Dey said der minister lifed in dis house," he said.

"Yes," replied the fair pastor.

"Vell, I—I vant to kit merrit."

"To get married? Very well; I can marry you."

"Oh, but I got a girl already," was the disconcerted reply.

THE manager of a factory engaged a new man and gave instructions to the foreman to instruct him in his duties. A few days afterward, the manager inquired whether the new man was progressing with his work.

The foreman, who had not agreed very well with the man in question, exclaimed angrily:

"Progressing! There's been a lot of progress. I have taught him everything I know, and he is still an ignorant fool."

STEPHEN LEACOCK, the celebrated Canadian humorist, was unexpectedly called upon to speak at a banquet in Montreal a few years ago. It was a dignified occasion, at which over two hundred prominent educators and clergymen were gathered. The regular speakers had delivered polished orations—long and learned.

Not so Mr. Leacock.

He got up slowly, glanced round the room as if seeking inspiration, and suddenly exclaimed,

"See that man over there with the bald head!" He pointed directly at one of the most distinguished clergymen in all Canada. Then he went on: "I used to have charge of the devotional exercises at McGill University. It was my business to secure speakers. I asked that man to come and preach for us and he refused. Several weeks later, I repeated my request and again he refused. Then I made up my mind to get him to come in spite of himself. I wrote him an eloquent appeal, begging him to favor us with his presence. He replied sooner than I had expected. 'Dear Leacock: I'll come and preach, but I'll be damned if I'll pray.'"

A YOUNG physician was buying furniture for the equipment of his office. The salesman racked his brain to think of something else to sell him.

He had sold almost everything that was appropriate or necessary when he had a happy thought.

"Oh, yes; I nearly forgot!" he exclaimed. "You need a door-mat."

"Not a new one," said the young doctor. "I'll get that at a second-hand store. A worn one will be a much better advertisement for me."

JOHNNY came back from the circus very much excited.

"Oh, mamma," he cried, as soon as he got in the house, "Kate spilled some peanuts, and what do you think the elephant did? He picked 'em all up with his vacuum cleaner."

BANG: I'm never afraid to tell a man anything, because it goes in one ear and out at the other.

Slam: Yes; but if you tell a woman anything, it goes in at both ears and out at the mouth.

Save This New Way

Make the money you work for, work for you. And at a liberal rate of interest. Investigate the new savings system offered by the U. S. Treasury Department.

THIS tells how $20 soon becomes $25, how $80 soon becomes $100, how $800 soon becomes $1000. It shows you how to earn 25 per cent in five years. And all with the greatest safety.

The United States Government, through the Treasury and Post Office Departments, has developed a new Savings System, which has received a spontaneous welcome from men and women throughout the Nation. The System is simple. It consists of new U. S. Treasury Savings Certificates, yielding at present issue prices 4½ per cent interest, compounded semi-annually, if held to maturity. They mature in five years, earning 25 per cent for that period.

But they can be redeemed at any time before maturity, at redemption prices which increase from month to month, yielding about 3½ per cent compounded semi-annually, so that your savings are constantly earning, and yet are available in emergency.

Begin Now

The advantages of this system are many—too numerous to list here. But everything is explained in a descriptive circular obtainable from your Postmaster or by sending direct to the United States Government Savings System, as addressed below.

Note some of the outstanding advantages: Any individual can buy up to $5000 maturity value of Treasury Savings Certificates of any one issue, and if desired can have them made payable to another person in case of death. The certificates are exempt from normal Federal Income Tax and from state and local taxation (except estate and inheritance taxes).

Learn all the advantages now offered by this new Savings System. See how to accumulate savings faster. And with complete safety. Once you know this simpler, more profitable way, you will surely adopt it, as thousands of others are doing throughout the land.

4½% on Savings

Treasury Savings Certificates present an ideal form of investment, fully protected, and with a liberal rate of interest. Each dollar saved earns 25 per cent in 5 years at present prices, which is at the rate of 4½ per cent a year, compounded semi-annually. If withdrawn before maturity you receive interest at the rate of 3½ per cent, compounded semi-annually.

Safety

These Certificates are a direct obligation of your government, the soundest investment conceivable, backed by the strength of the Nation. Your principal and interest are absolutely safe. Risk is eliminated. Certificates are registered in your name at time of purchase, protecting you against loss or theft.

Certain Value

The Certificates are not subject to market fluctuations and cannot depreciate in value. They are always worth what you paid for them plus the interest.

Payment on Demand

You can withdraw your money at any time, without waiting until maturity of the Certificates. This provides for any emergency. The Government, however, cannot call them for redemption before maturity.

Invest to the Limit

U. S. Treasury Savings Certificates are issued in denominations within the reach of all. You can now buy a $25 Certificate for $20, a $100 Certificate for $80 and a $1000 Certificate for $800.

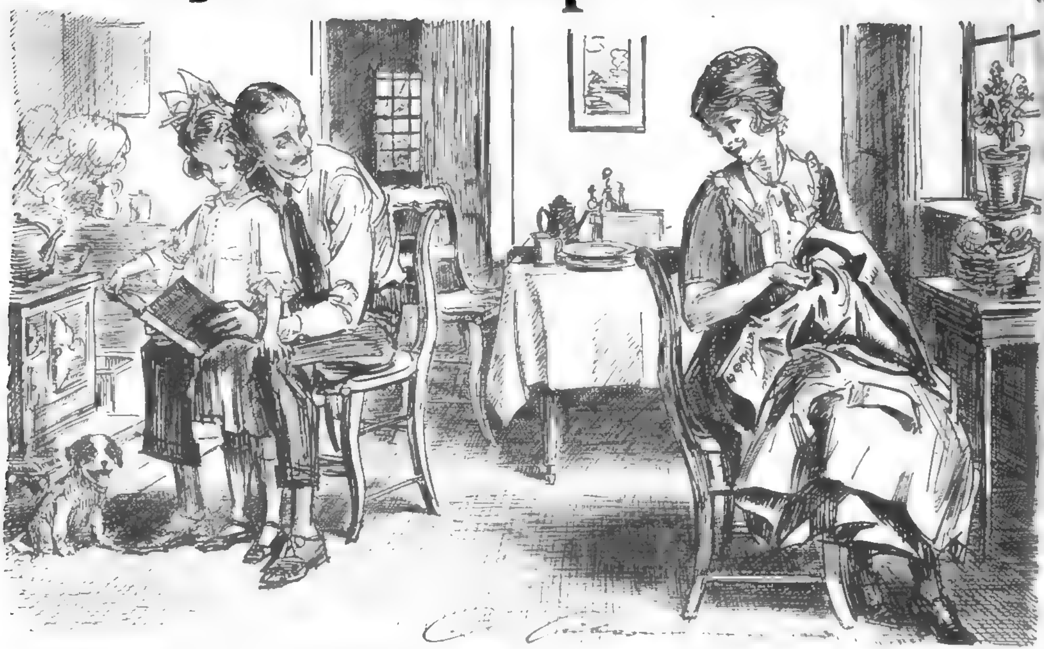
If you save less than $20 per month, you can accumulate Postal Savings Stamps at 10c each, or Treasury Savings Stamps at $1 each, both non-interest-bearing. Or you can open an interest-bearing Postal Savings Account. Then you can convert such savings into a Treasury Savings Certificate when you accumulate $20.

U. S. Treasury Savings Certificates may be purchased at Post Offices, Federal Reserve Banks, banks and trust companies, or direct from the U. S. Government Savings System. There is no red tape, no formality.

Do not delay in becoming acquainted with this simpler attractive system of making your dollars grow. Make the money you work for, work for you. See how quickly it earns 25%.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT SAVINGS SYSTEM
TREASURY DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C.

It *Pays* to Keep Folks Well



341,000 Happy People—
in the United States and Canada sat down last year to their Christmas dinners who wouldn't have been there if the death rate for 1921 had been the same as it was in 1911.

What happened to make conditions so much better? There has been a constantly growing organized effort to prolong human life.

Anti-tuberculosis associations, welfare organizations, nursing orders and legislative bodies have all taken a hand. The results show that lives have been and *can* be lengthened by the wise use of money, and that such an investment pays dividends in dollars.

When a breadwinner is taken away—
the family is poorer. A community suffers a very definite economic loss when it loses a number of lives. It increases the cost of living to have workers die needlessly. It increases taxes—to say nothing of the sorrow and unhappiness involved.

It *Pays* to Keep Folks Well

As soon as people realize—
that the wealth of the nation depends upon the men and women who make up the nation, the tremendous financial importance of prolonging human life becomes clear to everybody.

The United States is said to be the richest country in the world Take every man and woman away and what would it be worth? Not so much as it was when the red Indians owned it.

Even the unskilled laborer who works his full life-time makes the nation richer by several thousand dollars. It follows, therefore, that down to the smallest tax payer in the last small community, everybody is better off when lives are saved.

The work already done—
has saved the lives of fathers, mothers and children.

Saving fathers keeps families from becoming dependent.

Saving mothers helps to hold families together and keeps children out of public institutions.

Saving children adds to the future wealth of the nation.

THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

Protected Health means fewer deaths. Fewer deaths mean fewer policies to pay.

Just among the Metropolitan's 14,000,000 policy holders who paid their premiums weekly, there were 55,000 fewer deaths in 1921 than there would have been under the death rate prevailing ten years before.

Take the figures home to yourself. Suppose you are a Metropolitan policy holder—one of these 55,000 saved from death—your family is richer by the money you earned in 1921 and has been saved expenses incident to illness and death.

Other Metropolitan policy holders have been benefited by the premiums you paid in 1921, just as *you* have benefited by other lives saved.

The nation is better off for your contribution to the Country's wealth in 1921.

And, best of all, your family and friends are richer and happier by the fact that you yourself are still alive.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company will send its booklet, "How to Live Long," to anyone who asks for it.

HALEY FISKE, *President*

Published by
METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY—NEW YORK

Everybody's Business

INTERESTING LITTLE ANNOUNCEMENTS CONVENIENTLY CLASSIFIED FOR QUICK READING

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Big Money and Fast Sales. Every owner buys Gold Initials for his auto. You charge $1.50; make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 41, East Orange, N J.

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All men, women, boys and girls, over 17 years, willing to accept Government Positions, $135. Write Mr. Ozment, 296 St. Louis, Immediately.

Agents, $60 to $200 a week, free samples. Gold Sign Letters for Store and Office Windows. Any one can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431 Y, No. Clark St., Chicago.

Large manufacturer wants agents; sell advertised brand men's shirts direct to wearer. No capital or experience required. Free samples. Madison Mills, 505 Broadway, New York.

Live Agents Make $10 a Day selling Eureka Strainer and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. P. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin St., New York.

"$10 a Day and More," our new book, shows clearly how you may gain sure success and large profits selling Guaranteed Hosiery and Underwear factory to family. It is Free. Write today. C & D Co., 47-E, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Sales Representative Wanted every county to give all or spare time. Position worth $1200 to $3000 yearly. No previous experience or capital necessary. Write for full particulars. A. M. Silver-Chamberlin Co., Clayton, N. J.

Big Earnings and Steady Repeat Business assured agents selling to women and homes, finest, most complete line toilet preparations and specialties. Sure Success Plan. Get details today. Colonial Chemical Company, 631-F, Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Agents—can make big profits introducing to business and club men the only practical mechanical pencil ever made; outlasts all others; sells on sight; pleasant association. Write Dura Pencil Co., 115 Broad St., New York City.

Agents—Patented Automatic Nickel Ejector Cigarette Case. Sells on sight 150% profit. Live wires only. Big money for Hustlers. Make real cleanup. Superior Lamp Co., 150 West 52nd St., New York.

Great Profits Assured capable men joining immediately national selling organization for Evenflo Self-filling ink-pencil pen. Writes with ink instead of lead. Send for Profit Proposition. Evenflo Pen Co., Dept. 62, Grand Rapids, Mich.

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Good Farm Lands! 20, 40, 80 acre tracts near thriving city in Lower Michigan. $10 to $50 down. Balance long time. Investigate. Write today for FREE booklet giving full information. Swigart Land Co., V-1263 First Natl. Bank Bldg., Chicago.

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Faded Pictures, Tintypes, Daguerreotypes restored and enlarged. New process. Perfect results. Reasonable costs. Roanoke Photo Finishing Co., 518 Bell Ave., Roanoke, Va.

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Photoplays Wanted for California Producers and Stars. Also want Stories, Articles, etc., for publication. Submit Manuscripts, or, if you are a beginner, write for Free Plot Chart and Details. Harvard Company, 317, San Francisco, Cal.

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$5,000 in Prizes to readers of GLOOM. The Devil's Book. That new, Snappy, Jazzy Magazine. Chuck full of Hilarity, Ridicule, Sarcasm, Jokes and Red Hot Editorials of TRUTH. When Gloomy Buy Gloom. Have a laugh with Old Nick himself. Published Monthly. For Sale on News-stands at 25c per copy, $2.50 per year or direct from Gloom Publishing Co., Los Angeles, Calif.

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Ford Owners. Stop your Ford from Chattering by installing Bredar's Ball Shim. Price $1.00. Write for information. Nic Bredar's Son Mfg. Co., Rock Island, Ill.

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Patents. Write for Free Illustrated Guide Book and Evidence Of Conception Blank. Send model or sketch and description of your invention for our free opinion of its patentable nature. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 752 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

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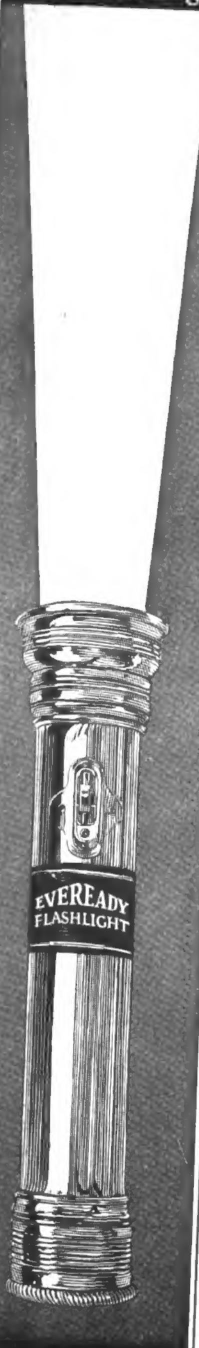
Inventors and Manufacturers, Look! Practical inventions spell F-O-R-T-U-N-E for you. Write us what inventions you have to sell or want to buy. Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 51, St. Louis Mo.

Eveready Spotlight
with the
300-ft. Range



There's an Eveready Flashlight complete for every purpose from $1.35 to $4

WATCH YOUR STEP—AN EVEREADY FLASHLIGHT PREVENTS ACCIDENTS

Carry an Eveready Spotlight every night!

The 300-ft. electric beam of this Eveready Spotlight *prevents* accidents by revealing danger. For motorists it's as necessary as a spare tire, to read road signs and meet emergencies; a perfect portable light for campers and Boy Scouts; for motor boating, canoeing, rowing; for every vacation need.

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Try out this wonderful Eveready Spotlight. Buy one of any dealer for $3.75. Use it over night, flashing its 300-ft. beam near and far. If you want to return it next day, the dealer will refund your money without argument. (Frankly, you will keep it. No one wants to part with an Eveready Spotlight after trying it out.)

For sale everywhere at electrical, hardware, sporting goods, drug, and auto accessory shops; garages; general stores.

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EVEREADY
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Eveready Flashlight Batteries give brighter light; last longer; fit and improve all makes of flashlights

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Best under the sun

VIVAUDOU'S

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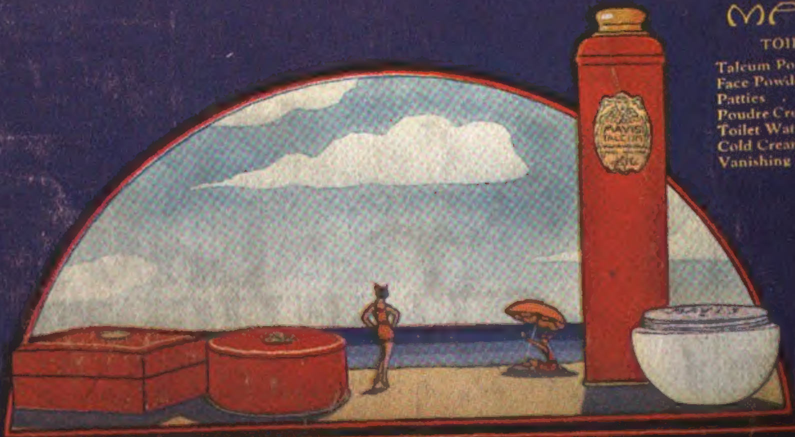
TALC 25¢

In the tall red can with the gold top-

Wonderfully soothing and cooling! A welcome relief for sun and wind burn. Delightfully refreshing after golf, tennis, bathing, and motoring.

Finest imported talc —soft as velvet.

Use it after your bath—when warm or tired and you'll see the vast difference between Mavis and ordinary talcum.



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Face Powder	.50
Patties	1.00
Poudre Creme	.50
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Cold Cream	.50
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